

# CJR

COLUMBIA  
JOURNALISM  
REVIEW

*The Philadelphia Inquirer*  
and the Future of  
American Newspapers

## LOOKING FOR LIGHT

*Michael Shapiro*

HOW TO BUILD  
A CHRISTIAN NETWORK  
WITH \$38  
(AND HELP FROM THE FCC)

*Daniel Schulman*

ACID TEST:  
WHEN TOM WOLFE  
WENT ELECTRIC

*Jack Shafer*

THE SECRET WORLD  
OF THE  
IRAQI STRINGERS

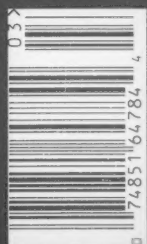
*Paul McLeary*

WALTER PINCUS:  
THE MAN WHO WOULD  
FIX WASHINGTON

*David Glenn*

TRUTH AND  
CONSEQUENCES:  
BEYOND THE  
FREY AFFAIR

*Samuel G. Freedman*



MARCH/APRIL 2006  
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## OPENING SHOT



AP/WIDEWORLD/HADI MIZBAN

## Costs and Benefits

**I**t's hard to keep track of all the challenges to journalism these days — financial constraints, political pressures, technological upheaval. Journalists must adapt. In our cover story, "Looking for Light," Michael Shapiro tells of an effort to do so at *The Philadelphia Inquirer*. That storied newspaper, briefly free of corporate interference from a distracted Knight Ridder, is striking out in interesting directions. Even as editors and reporters adapt, though, it is healthy to keep in mind what can't be abandoned in the throes of change — the complex and significant stories that a troubled world waits to hear. Iraq is Exhibit A, and the press has not yet shrunk from that story despite the cost — sixty-one journalists and twenty-three media workers killed as of mid-February. Thirty-nine more abducted, including Jill Carroll, the freelancer; scores more injured, including ABC's Bob Woodruff and Doug Vogt, gravely wounded by a roadside bomb in January. As Paul McLeary notes in his story on page 20, Iraqi stringers are filling a void, covering parts of Iraq where Westerners dare not go anymore. Journalists have had to adapt in Iraq, too, but they have kept faith with the core mission. We should all take note. **CJR**

The body of Allan Enwiyah, who had been working as a translator for Jill Carroll, the kidnapped American freelancer, is recovered on January 6.



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## CONTENTS

MARCH/APRIL 2006

*"To assess the performance of journalism . . . to help stimulate continuing improvement in the profession, and to speak out for what is right, fair, and decent."*

— From the founding editorial, 1961

### ARTICLES

- THE STRINGERS** Paul McLeary goes inside the secret and dangerous world of the Iraqi journalists who are becoming the eyes and the ears of the Western press. **20**
- LOOKING FOR LIGHT** At *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, editor Amanda Bennett is trying to clear the air of nostalgia and reinvent the modern daily newspaper. By Michael Shapiro **24**
- THE OPTIMIST** For forty years, Walter Pincus has mucked around D.C.'s darkest corners, and yet he remains determined to reform Washington, piece by piece. By David Glenn **38**
- OUT OF THIN AIR** How an FCC giveaway helped Clark Parrish turn \$38 into a national Christian radio network. By Daniel Schulman **45**

### COMMENTARY

- EDITORIAL** In the Golden Age, newspapers had a monopoly on the market, with guaranteed profits and readers. Thank God it's over. **5**
- VOICES** Jared Flesher revisits a tough decision as a college editor, and, on the anniversary of last year's school shooting at Red Lake reservation, Louise Mengelkoch looks back in anger. **10**
- DARTS & LAURELS** Misspent security dollars, feel-good tales, a wrongful execution revealed, and more. By Gloria Cooper **14**
- STATE OF THE ART** The people of the Arctic need to know about the science and politics behind their changing climate. *Nunatsiag News* is on the job. By Kiera Butler **15**
- SCENE** In the rubble of a powerful earthquake, Radio Muzaffarabad struggles to hold a Pakistani community together. By Ayesha Akram **64**

### IDEAS & REVIEWS

- ESSAY** The publishing world's lack of devotion to truth runs much deeper than James Frey and the memoir. By Samuel G. Freedman **50**
- SECOND READ** Jack Shafer on Tom Wolfe's *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*, and the underappreciated art of finding and dissecting cultural trends. **54**
- REVIEWS** *Absolute Convictions: My Father, a City, and the Conflict That Divided America* by Eyal Press. Reviewed by Jeff Sharlet **58**
- BOOK REPORTS** By James Boylan **61**
- PASSAGES** *Infamous Scribblers: The Founding Fathers and the Rowdy Beginnings of American Journalism* by Eric Burns; *In Search of Willie Morris: The Mercurial Life of a Legendary Writer and Editor* by Larry L. King **62**

### DEPARTMENTS

- OPENING SHOT** **1**    **LETTERS** **6**    **CURRENTS** **16**
- THE AMERICAN NEWSROOM** **18**    **THE LOWER CASE** **INSIDE BACK COVER**

COVER: JEAN-MANUEL DUVIVIER

*"Writing for New York and Esquire in the sixties was like playing saxophone at the cutting contests at Minton's."*

— Jack Shafer, p. 55



Developers of tract houses cut down 50 acres of trees over the sensitive recharge zone of the Edwards Aquifer to make way for this project. Many fear this and other large clear-cuts will endanger San Antonio's water supply.

## Reading the newspaper is helping readers keep their heads above water.



John Tedesco, Reporter

Residents of South Texas rely on the Edwards Aquifer for most of their water supply. Preserving open space and tree cover over the watershed is crucial to preventing pollution of the underground reservoir.

When developers clear-cut wide swaths of forest to build dense subdivisions on the protected terrain, San Antonio Express-News reporter John Tedesco launched an investigation and discovered an obscure Texas law that allowed developers to sidestep city codes. This state law undermined the city's intention to protect the aquifer, preserve tree cover and promote livable neighborhoods.

Tedesco's four-part series, "Losing Ground," revealed in detail how powerful developers used influence

at the Texas state Legislature to win exemptions from city codes. Marshaling the power of databases, public records and shoe-leather reporting, Tedesco also found the city routinely signed off on the exemptions.

Readers responded to the coverage with a deluge of e-mails and online comments, questioning how the protections failed and demanding a crackdown on irresponsible development. San Antonio's mayor and city council have vowed to hold the industry accountable. One company apologized for clear-cutting its properties and promised to be a better environmental steward. To read the full series online, visit: [mysanantonio.com](http://mysanantonio.com)

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## EDITORIAL

## ALL THAT GLITTERS

## How years of monopoly undermined newspapers

Chapter three of our cover story on *The Philadelphia Inquirer* is titled "Curse of the Golden Age," referring to a period that, for the *Inquirer*, came in two stages during the seventies and eighties. First the *Inky* became a bold and creative insurgent newspaper under the legendary editor Gene Roberts. Then it killed off its afternoon competitor, the *Bulletin*, and embarked on what Roberts called the Alpha Plan. It set out to become a great regional paper of record, covering city and suburb, nation and world, with depth and flair. The *Inquirer* no longer has the resources for that kind of newspaper-of-record journalism and halfway measures don't work. So editor Amanda Bennett, even as she waits to learn just what kind of owner will replace Knight Ridder, is trying something new. Or maybe something old, since she is reaching back to the early Roberts premonopoly version of the *Inquirer* for ideas.

The chapter is specific to the *Inky's* situation, which is complex. But the notion of a curse from the golden days of the sixties, seventies, and eighties resonates beyond that newspaper. As we all know, trends in those years turned newspapers into economic powerhouses. The rise of the computer brought enormous labor savings, for example, while the fall of the afternoon dailies in city after city created lucrative advertising and readership monopolies. Consolidating newspaper chains saw the opportunities and went public, pulling in new money from investors. Ample profits and rising investment meant rising editorial ambitions in some places and fat, lazy days for others. Either way, the trends also created investor expectations of very high profit margins in the newspaper business, which would turn out to be a quite a curse indeed when those margins dipped.

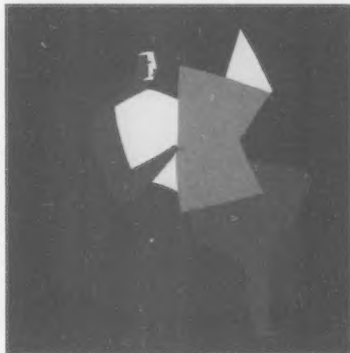
That history is familiar. But another facet of the age of news monopoly gets less attention

in newspaper circles: How much did the condition of editorial monopoly quietly undermine the journalism?

Competition is good, remember. It nourishes aggressive reporting and distinctive, creative approaches. With a lack of competition in the local news and information business, too many papers, even some of the more ambitious ones, allowed their voices and personalities to wither. Too many editorial pages toned it down and slid into the inoffensive and boring. Too few embarked on crusades. Corporate owners, too, encouraged a play-it-safe culture. Too many newspapers rounded off their ragged edges, but lost the spark. When the advertising and readership began to recede, so did resources, and those weak habits and attitudes began to reveal themselves like the fish on the beach before the tsunami.

Whether editors used it well or wasted it, the golden age of monopoly is gone. Newspapers are in competition with *everything* now, and they have fewer troops to deploy. Editors know this. But it's not yet clear at some papers that they know it deeply enough to try to lift those troops to levels of creativity that this loss of a news monopoly requires, to help time-pressed reporters make sharper choices, and to remind them over and over that they have qualities that few bloggers or radio jabbermouths or cable talkers come close to supplying: a visceral knowledge of the turf and an ability to report deeply and write with both voice *and* authority, given time and a little encouragement.

Readers have all kinds of choices now. But whether they read the news on the Web or on paper they are still thirsting for that magic elixir of personality and expertise. To tweak a line from Samuel Gompers, they want *better*. Along with support from their owners, newspapers need a creative response to that need. And maybe, over time, that's a good thing. **CJR**



## LETTERS

## ON THE BIAS

I have read Nicholas Lemann's books, *The Big Test* and *The Promised Land*, which were written with a liberal bias, and which I found informative and worth the read. The discipline of objectivity, which he rightly respects, is what made this seemingly contradictory achievement possible. Like the rest of us he has a bias, but in submitting that bias to this discipline he was able to achieve an informative result. I applaud his commitment to teaching Columbia journalism students the importance of this discipline.

Our concern in publishing the study "Representation of Political Perspectives in Law and Journalism Faculties" was not that Columbia lacks an artificially imposed balance. Our concern was that because conservatives are effectively **excluded** from the Columbia faculty the standard of curricular objectivity the school is able to achieve is unnecessarily (and regrettably) low.

Lemann's article bears this out. It is pointedly titled "On Balance," which misrepresents its subject. In doing so, it reflects a bias so institutionally entrenched at Columbia that even an honest reporter like Lemann is unable to correct for it.

The thrust of "On Balance" is that to achieve ideological balance through affirmative action hiring quotas for conservatives would be harmful to the very cause of objective journalism. I agree. Contrary to the article's main point, I have never called for "balance" on academic faculties, nor does the word "balance" appear in our study. To demonstrate, as we have, that there is an absurd scarcity of conservatives on faculties like Columbia's is not the same as saying you ought to have an equal number of conservatives and leftists, let alone that there should be a political litmus in hiring so that the politics of a candidate would be checked before, or in place of, any other factor. This is a pretty big error, since it is the substance of Lemann's case.



The slogan of my academic-freedom campaign encapsulates the problem: "You can't get a good education if they're only telling you half the story." The absence of conservatives on Columbia's faculty denies its members the intellectual challenge that is necessary to maintain a quality standard.

Lemann has already conceded this in describing his invitation to Tunku Varadarajan to co-teach a course with him, explaining: "Our mission should be to rid our students of automatic or blinkered thinking; . . . to make them push themselves to find alternative perspectives."

I applaud him for this. The point of the study we have published and of my academic-freedom campaign is that this laudable gesture is simply not enough.

David Horowitz  
Publisher, [frontpagemag.com](http://frontpagemag.com)  
Los Angeles, California

I had a wise old J-school prof named Gil Cranberg who taught a senior editing class at the University of Iowa. Among the things he taught us is to be very suspicious when a writer turns in work with words like "everything," "entirely," or "every."

They are very strong words and, more often than not, they're simply wrong. Most Republicans may believe in tax cuts, but not every Republican does. Those words

are also favored tools of demagogues like Rush Limbaugh. Listen to his show and you'll hear things such as "Democrats always . . ." or "These protesters disagree with everything America stands for."

So it was with some disappointment that I read Nicholas Lemann's defense of J-schools from charges that they lean too far left. Each time he confronts the arguments of David Horowitz, he distorts Horowitz's arguments exactly as Limbaugh would:

What's more important is that Horowitz assumes that **everything** we teach has a political view embedded within it. Journalism is not physics, but most of what we teach does not have any obvious ideological content.

What the Horowitz approach may gain in refreshing honesty is outweighed by what it loses by just giving up on the informational mission **entirely**.

For us to build in liberal-conservative balance in **every** hire and **every** class would be to take us away from our core assumption, which is that reporting can get you meaningfully closer to the truth.

Plenty of things J-schools teach have some ideological content. The Horowitz approach may make the "informational mission" secondary, but he does not abandon it entirely. Nobody's asking for liberal-conservative balance in every class or every hire. With Republicans outnumbered 15 to 1 at Columbia's J-school, why not start thinking about ideological diversity in some hires?

David Mastio  
Editor, *InOpinion*  
Chesapeake, Virginia

*Nicholas Lemann responds: I appreciate the cordial tone of Horowitz's letter, but I still don't understand how he thinks the voter registration preferences of our faculty affect classroom teaching in the school, especially in skills courses, and what mechanism he thinks we should use to get more conservatives on our*



*faculty, given that we don't ask people we hire about their political views. Massimo is right to call me on the use of "every," but, again, exactly what policy are he and Horowitz proposing for our hiring and our curriculum? I don't think I'm the only reader of Horowitz's writing on the subject who would infer that he wants to impose some kind of ideological balance requirement on universities.*

## MISSTEPS IN MIAMI

Tom Austin's excellent piece about *The Miami Herald* and its firing of controversial columnist Jim DeFede (CJR, January/February) omitted one important factor. That was DeFede's defiance of the *Herald's* relentless kowtowing to a diminishing but still powerful right-wing and hardcore element in Miami's Cuban-American community.

The *Herald* has consistently supported the Cuban embargo, a failed policy since its inception forty-five years ago. The *Herald* has consistently endorsed the three Cuban-American members of Congress who steer these failed policies and continue to battle family visitation rights and even the right of Cuban-Americans to send their relatives soap and toilet paper. Any candidate taking exception to these policies has no chance of winning a *Herald* endorsement.

In the December 31 "King Mango" satirical parade in Miami's Coconut Grove, Grand Marshal Jim DeFede rode with a sign identifying him as the "King Kong of Controversy," picking up sections of the *Herald* every minute or two and tearing them in half, to the cheers of the crowd.

Richard Rosichan  
Miami Beach, Florida

Tom Austin makes a mistake in his "Miami Noir" that if not corrected might give credibility to those who argue against laws requiring the disclosure of public documents.

Austin suggests that publication of

the documents that led to Art Teele's suicide was the "mixed blessing" of the "noble precept" of Florida's long tradition of government in the sunshine. That is untrue. The raw police reports that so distressed Teele were in a prosecution court filing as part of the state's corruption case against Teele — they were not released because of any requirement of Florida's open records act.

Miami legal circles are still debating whether the prosecution should have included unproven allegations against Teele in a public court filing, just as journalists are still discussing whether *Miami New Times* should have published them. But Florida's commendable open records laws bear no responsibility here; in fact, had a reporter sought the documents from police or prosecutors, the law probably would have exempted them from release because they were part of an ongoing criminal investigation.

Mark Seibel  
Managing editor/International  
Knight Ridder Washington bureau  
Washington, D.C.  
(The writer is a former managing  
editor of *The Miami Herald*)

In his article, "Miami Noir," Tom Austin states matter-of-factly that my conversation with former Miami City Commissioner Art Teele — the one I secretly recorded — was "off the record" and that by attempting to write about that conversation I had violated a fundamental journalistic principle. This accusation was initially promoted by *Herald* executives to buttress their hasty decision to fire me. The accusation, however, is false.

Common sense dictates that Teele wanted me to write about our final conversation.

Teele and I had not spoken in four months, and then, less than an hour before killing himself he called me. Think about that. The last person Teele contacted before shooting himself in the lobby of *The Miami Herald* wasn't his wife or

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his son or his minister, the last person he called was me, whom he repeatedly described as the only reporter in Miami he could trust to tell his story fairly.

But if common sense doesn't dictate that Teele wanted me to write about our final conversation, Teele himself made it clear after his death. As we would learn weeks later, Teele made a separate tape, addressed to me, which he brought to the *Herald* when he committed suicide. I've yet to hear the tape, but according to prosecutors Teele's comments on that tape are virtually the same as the phone conversation we had. He was explaining why he had lost hope.

The fact that Teele made his own tape to be delivered to me after his death, is perhaps the most compelling evidence of all that Teele wanted me to write about his thoughts in the final moments of his life and any argument to the contrary is ludicrous.

Jim DeFede  
Miami, Florida

*(In January, DeFede was hired as a full-time reporter and commentator for WFOR-TV, the CBS affiliate in Miami.)*

## THE PLAME GAME

Timothy M. Phelps incorrectly describes my agreement to testify in the Plame investigation (*CJR*, January/February). The scope of the questioning during my deposition was quite limited. I did not discuss two conversations I had had with I. Lewis Libby in July 2003, but merely affirmed that the subjects

of Valerie Plame, Joseph Wilson, and Wilson's trip to Niger were not raised in those conversations. The actual subjects of those conversations remain off the record, per my agreement with my source.

Glenn Kessler  
Diplomatic correspondent  
*The Washington Post*  
Washington, D.C.

Phelps's article bemoaning the effect that Judy Miller's case has had on reporters and the First Amendment ignores the two key points:

1. Even if a well-developed reporter-source privilege existed, it wouldn't apply to Judy Miller in this case anyway. The exposure of Valerie Plame's identity as a CIA employee to Miller was the crime; and as such Miller was an *eyewitness* to that crime. An attorney who watched his client shoot someone would not be able to claim attorney-client privilege to not testify about what he saw. The way to have minimized the damage done to the First Amendment would have been not to go to the mat on such a weak case in the first place. Read Judge Tatel's argument in the appeals court decision for a limited reporter-source privilege, based on Department of Justice rules of evidence. With a more clear-cut case, perhaps Tatel might have convinced one of his colleagues to go along with his argument.

2. The standard for protecting sources should be simple: whistleblowers get protected; smear mongers get outed. And the

argument that reporters wouldn't be able to tell the difference is beyond weak; it's ludicrous.

Bill Rudman  
Castro Valley, California

*Timothy M. Phelps replies: I agree with Rudman's point that the Miller case was a dangerous one to make law with. But such is often the case. It is true that a federal reporter's privilege might not have applied to Miller, as I tried to suggest, for example, in the last paragraph by saying, "Of course, [reporters] never did have the right to offer complete confidentiality in every circumstance." And, of course, I clearly disagree when Rudman suggests that "smear mongers get outed." One person's smear monger is another person's, well, source.*

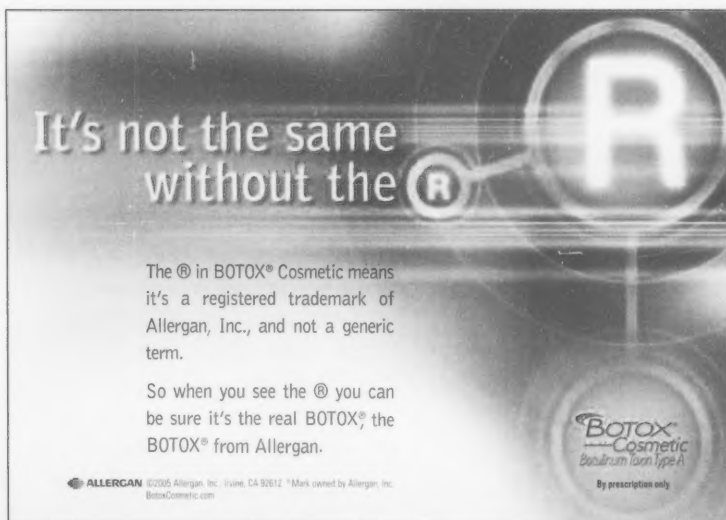
*Editor's note: Phelps's article incorrectly stated that Wen Ho Lee "is suing government agencies for allegedly leaking fake information about him." In fact, the basis of his contention is that the reporters' sources violated his privacy.*

## 'DRUG TEST' TESTED

I am disturbed by the article, "Drug Test," by Daniel Schulman (*CJR*, November/December), which purports to be a balanced look at issues surrounding thimerosal (a mercury-based vaccine preservative) and autism, a developmental condition first seen in childhood. While tilting away from science and toward the believers' side, he ends up with an article that qualifies as faith-based journalism.

The article mentions eight reports from nine meetings the independent Institute of Medicine held from 2001 to 2004 *as if they were the equivalent* of the anguished cries of parents seeking an answer. The final IOM study was conducted by thirteen senior scientists and health officials who collectively hold seventeen advanced degrees and serve at twelve universities and medical centers around the country. It was not a frivolous exercise. Those studies are both acknowledged, then dismissed, usually in favor of beliefs expressed by reporters, or advocates.

The article throws out theories of a conspiracy between scientists, the federal government, and drug companies to suppress or deny the alleged connections, but remarkably never pursues them. The article



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blends in the unrelated hardball lobbying tactics of the pharmaceutical industry as if they were proof of the thimerosal theory (rather than the industry's standard aggressive business practice). The article devotes four lengthy paragraphs to the fringe notion of "chelation therapy," which is best described on a Web site called quackwatch.org.

The article identifies the university affiliations of researchers who anecdotally support some aspect of the thimerosal-did-it view or who think that more research into this specific issue is needed. But it never identifies the university affiliations of those who worked on the three-year IOM study and unanimously concluded that there was no causal link and that funds could best be spent elsewhere.

Go to the last paragraph of the story to see the tilt away from an understanding of the scientific method and toward a romantic view of journalism, with reporters as the lonely Davids ready to take down the behemoth Coliaths: "Whether the thimerosal theory is proved right or wrong, there will be consequences — for the public health apparatus and vaccine manufacturers, for parents and their children, even for journalists." Excuse me, but the thimerosal theory has been proven to be wrong. We are talking about scientific inquiry here, not gumshoe political reporting. A real opportunity was lost here, and a remarkably vaporuous smokescreen has been thrown up in the name of "balance."

Bob Meyers

President, National Press Foundation  
Washington, D.C.

*Daniel Schulman responds: The major assumption in Meyers's letter is that "the thimerosal theory has been proven wrong." That is simply untrue. But don't take my word for it. Take the word of the Centers for Disease Control. The agency is currently conducting a study on precisely whether there is any connection between mercury-containing vaccines and autism, a line of inquiry it would hardly waste time or money on if the thimerosal theory had been authoritatively debunked.*

*Contrary to what Meyers suggests, nowhere in the story do I assert a definitive link between thimerosal and autism, or anything even approaching that. What I do state is that "there is science left to be done and scientists eager to do it," which seems to be in accord with the CDC's official position.*

*Although I never intimate, as Meyers suggests, that the IOM is anything less than a highly respected institution that undertook a serious review, I do cover some legitimate concerns that have surfaced about the methodology of some of the primary studies the IOM relied on. In addition, my failure to list the university affiliations of the IOM's panel was in no way an attempt to undercut the credibility of its work; I repeatedly make it clear that the "bulk" of the scientific establishment believes no association exists between thimerosal and autism. Since reputable researchers on the other side of this debate have often been portrayed by their peers and others as charlatans, I thought it important that readers be aware of just who these "charlatans" are.*

*Meyers also claims that I push conspiracy theories, though I clearly state my views on the "evidence" of conspiracy that advocates of the thimerosal theory have amassed. Referring to the minutes of a hush-hush meeting of public health officials, researchers, and reps from leading vaccine manufacturers, and other similar documents that advocates point to as proof of an autism connection or a cover-up of same, I write: "Simpsonwood is not a smoking gun. Nor are other documents that purport to be." I also note that there is no proof that the IOM manipulated data to whitewash a link between thimerosal and autism, as some allege.*

*Far from writing about chelation as an advocate, I note it solely in the context of a five-year-old boy who died as a result of this therapy. My aim was to point out that the consequences of lending any measure of credibility to the thimerosal theory are not purely theoretical and that journalists who choose to write about this subject must grapple with that reality.*

*Ultimately, perhaps Meyers and I disagree on what the "scientific method" really is. In my view, debate and controversy are integral to the process. But we are in agreement that when it comes to the thimerosal question, "a vaporuous smokescreen" has indeed obscured the issue.*

## NUCLEAR CLARITY

In a letter to the editor published in the January/February issue, Rick Lehner, communica-

tions director for the U.S. Missile Defense Agency, claimed that I had "injected an important error" into my November/December Voices piece ("Hair-Trigger Nukes") by suggesting "that the U.S. strategic nuclear deterrent force is part of the National Missile Defense System." He offered no evidence that my article made such a link between missile defense and strategic nuclear forces, however, because he had none. And, even if I had made such a link, it would not have amounted to "an important error." The missile defense agency and strategic nuclear forces are separate organizationally and for the most part operationally, but as Bruce Blair, a recognized authority in the field, told me, "they are now closely linked in terms of doctrine, roles, and missions, according to Bush's Nuclear Posture Review submitted to Congress in 2001, in which it is stated that offensive nuclear forces and active defense are integrally related. In addition, the operational overlap between strategic offensive and missile defense forces on alert is the common global early warning network on which both rely."

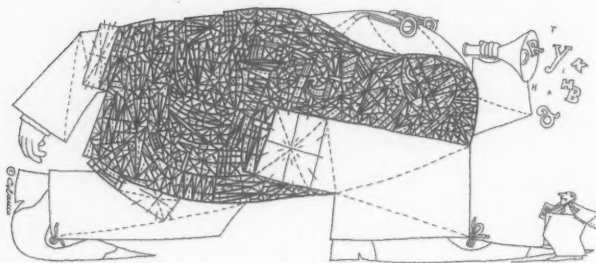
Morton Mintz  
Washington, D.C.

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## VOICES



GLAUCO DELLA SCIUCCA

BY JARED FLESHER

**BETWEEN RIGHT AND WRONG****A student journalist names (some) names**

College journalism is community-based journalism in its purest form: we write about the people we sit next to in class and the ones we see at parties on Friday night. From 2002 to 2005 I worked as an editor at *The Collegian*, our campus paper at the University of Richmond in Virginia. During this time, we reported on a classmate who drove drunk and killed a mother of three; a professor who was shot dead in his driveway by his ex-wife; and a friend and co-editor who drowned in a river after a night of drinking. But the toughest decision I faced centered on the question of printing students' names in our weekly crime blotter.

The Police Beat, one of the most widely read sections in the paper, is a straightforward listing of all the crimes and arrests on campus each week. Some years ago, editors of *The Collegian* took the university to court to get access to the names of arrested students. *The Collegian* lost the case because of the way the law was written, but the editors persevered and helped push a new law through the Virginia General Assembly that required private universities to make their crime logs public (with the interesting exception that names related to minor alcohol violations and drunk driving arrests could be withheld). As

the years passed, *The Collegian* continued to print the names of arrested students in news articles about the most serious crimes, but eventually stopped printing names in the Police Beat for everything else. That's how things stood when I took over as editor in chief in February 2004. I felt the policy was inconsistent, and that it made light of the crimes we weren't covering.

I thought long and hard about what change, if any, to make, and then took my proposal to my staff to get its opinions. The majority, and all my top editors, supported printing names in the Police Beat, but a small yet vocal minority did not. After all, they argued, why would a college newspaper want to hurt the school's own students? Wasn't being arrested punishment enough? Shouldn't young people be allowed to make mistakes?

Knowing I risked dissension among my co-workers, I explained my decision in that week's editorial: "Not printing the names of everyone arrested on campus creates an impression that the adult students at the University of Richmond need not be held responsible for their actions." I informed readers that, starting the next week, *The Collegian* would print the names of all students arrested on campus, with the exception of those involved in minor alcohol violations.

I expected to face resistance from the campus police department and the university, and criticism from the student body. As it turned out, the police department seemed more than happy to provide all the information we want-



ed, one high-ranking university official told me he supported the change, and not a single student wrote to *The Collegian* to protest. In fact, the only time students complained about the policy was after they themselves had been arrested and an editor contacted them to see if they wished to comment. We received both threats and impassioned pleas from charged students asking us not to identify them in the paper, but in all cases we did.

My crisis at *The Collegian* came after a male student was arrested on charges of "stalking" a female student who was his ex-girlfriend. The situation was complicated because the woman had first taken her problem to the campus police, who elected not to make an arrest (many alleged crimes on campus are referred to the dean rather than going through the criminal system). She then filed an official complaint in district court, writing that she feared for her safety and had asked her former boyfriend, approximately eight times, to stop contacting her. A warrant was issued by the judge and the male student was arrested soon after.

The arrested student contacted *The Collegian* via e-mail, told us not to print his name, and warned us that we had better talk to his lawyer. When I contacted the lawyer, he tried to convince me not to print the student's name. I was a little intimidated by his tough talk and serious manner, I'll admit, but I didn't relent. I explained to him that the arrest was newsworthy, in the public record, and would be treated like all other arrests. I also assured him we would follow up on the case and let our readers know the outcome. Then the lawyer asked if we were going to print the name of the woman who said she was being stalked. I said no, and then the lawyer really turned on the pressure.

The name of an accuser is just as much a part of the public record as the name of the accused, he argued, noting that newspapers routinely print both except in cases of rape, incest, or those involving a juvenile. I knew all this, but the lawyer forcefully insisted it would be unfair if we named his client but not his client's accuser. I told him I'd have to think about it.

The situation was complicated further by the fact that the woman had already e-mailed us to say she didn't want her personal business to show up in the paper. I had respectfully told her there would be a short article in the Police Beat detailing the arrest, but that we had no plans to identify her by name.

I talked to *The Collegian's* adviser and other journalism professors, and they all agreed that the fair thing to do was to follow accepted journalistic practice: print both names. I talked to trusted members of my staff and they were just as confused as I was. In past situations, I had almost always deferred to my grounding in hard news values, and my professors' opinions carried a lot of weight. Yet instinct made me question those values. Doesn't a woman who says she has been stalked face a stigma similar to someone who reports a sexual assault? I know the magnitude of the crimes is different, but couldn't the fear be the same?

I wish I had mulled it longer, but I had a paper to edit, so I embraced the comforts of precedent: we would print both names. I called the woman, but she wasn't home, so I sent her an e-mail saying *The Collegian* had reevaluated

### **I felt like an imposter, because I knew that I could break the rules when necessary.**

its decision. Later that night, as I was dealing with another sensitive article set to run on the front page, she called the office. I heard the stress in her voice, and I could tell she was on the verge of tears. She asked me to explain why I had changed my mind, and what purpose it would serve to publish her name. As I told her about the rules of journalism, I felt like an imposter, because I knew full well that I could break the rules when necessary. I hung up the phone, relieved that at least the difficult conversation was over, but then couldn't help but retreat to the hallway to try to pace out a better alternative. Later, back in the office, the phone rang again; it was the woman's mother.

She said her daughter didn't know she was calling, but she wanted me to hear her out. She explained as calmly as she could all the facts of the case as she knew them, and all the anguish it was causing her daughter, who had gone to the police only because she wanted help. The student had never expected it to get into the paper. As a mother, she was asking me not to hurt her daughter.

I told her I would think about it some more and call her back.

The acid in my stomach was rising and my head was pounding. In the midst of all that was going on in the newsroom, I needed to get away. I retreated again to the long, empty hall-

way outside of the *Collegian* office and sat down in the farthest and darkest corner. I prayed to the Great Newspaper Editor in the Sky for guidance.

I had already aggravated the situation by changing my mind once, but this time I was going to get it right. The easiest thing would have been not to run anything at all; nobody would have cared, but I was committed to the new policy I had established for the Police Beat. A true journalist would print both names. Instead, I went with my gut.

I called both parties and told them my final decision. We printed the arrested student's name, not the accuser's. The following paragraph was part of the article in the next day's paper:

[The arrested student's lawyer] wished it to be noted that he thought *The Collegian's* decision not to print the complainant's name was unfair and irresponsible. Public records available in this case can be accessed from the Richmond District Court clerk.

Should I have handled the situation better? Yes. Was it the right decision in the end? I don't know. Two of my female editors e-mailed me afterward to say they thought I had made the right call. As it turned out, the stalking charge was never prosecuted.

Of his experience working at a college newspaper, the author Kurt Vonnegut once remarked:

I was happy when I was all alone — and it was very late at night, and I was walking up the hill after having helped put *The Sun* to bed. All the other university people, teachers and students alike, were asleep. They had been playing games all day long with what was known about real life. They had been repeating famous arguments and experiments, and asking one another the sorts of hard questions real life would be asking by and by. We on *The Sun* were already in the midst of real life. By God if we weren't.

When I finally left the *Collegian* office on my last, and very late, night as editor, all alone as I had been so many times before, walking up a hill no less, I understood his words as if I had written them myself. ■

*Jared Flesher is a freelance writer based in central New Jersey. He recently completed an internship at The Wall Street Journal Online.*

BY LOUISE MENGELKOCH

## BLIND IN RED LAKE

How the press made a bad thing worse

March 21 will mark the one-year anniversary of the Red Lake Reservation high school shootings that left ten people dead, including the gunman, sixteen-year-old Jeff Weise. Bemidji State University, where I teach journalism, is in a small resort town of the same name thirty miles south of the school. Over the years it has been a continual challenge to recruit and retain Red Lakers and Native American students from the two other nearby reservations (White Earth and Leech Lake) for our journalism program. It's harder still, in the wake of that story.

I happened to be in England with thirty BSU students when we saw the headlines in the London papers. We felt shock, grief, and a strange sense of loss, knowing we'd never be part of the shared memories of our community, horrible though they were. When I returned, I discovered that part of those shared memories was centered on disgust with the news media that descended on Red Lake from around the country and the world.

Eyewitness accounts were not flattering: one reporter sneaked into a closed hospital wing. Others slipped into funerals from which the media were specifically banned. Some offered candy and cigarettes to teenagers in exchange for information, yearbooks, or access of some kind. Most treated the local media with indifference and disrespect. Unfortunately, most local residents I spoke with, both Native American and white, approved of the tribal government's extreme measures in trying to control the press, which included herding reporters to a penned area in a parking lot, warning that leaving the road constituted trespassing, arresting photographers and confiscating their equipment.

The situation dramatized the excesses of both positions — demand for access and excessive demand for secrecy and control — when pushed to their logical extreme. Those two forces were exacerbated by the horrific nature of the crime, the international media attention, and Red Lake's closed society. Red Lake residents are justly proud that their land has never been broken up, but their unity and isolation have come at a price. Red Lake's constitution has no free-speech clause, and it has seldom been challenged.

When the front door is closed on a big story, as one Tribal Council spokesman conceded, the media will head for the back door. Still, the be-

havior of the outside news media made it even harder for those of us left behind to push for civil liberties on the reservation. It also made it harder for local journalists, who have the unenviable job of providing news to and about a reservation with no free press of its own.

The *Bemidji Pioneer's* editor, Molly Miron, studies the Ojibwe language at the university. She studied Lakota when she worked in South Dakota. She arrived at Red Lake High School last year only forty-five minutes after the shooting because one of her sources called her on a cell phone, and took the photo of the three teenage girls hugging each other that showed up on the front page of newspapers around the world. "Media need to educate themselves about the culture of the area," she says. "It's not that hard with the Internet. You'd think they'd do their homework."

Brad Swenson, the *Pioneer's* opinion-page/political editor, thought the "cloister" that tribal officials created for the media was too drastic a measure, but says he can understand why it happened. He, too, witnessed the poor behavior of the outside press, and empathized with tribal friends. But he also keeps a framed copy of his Red Lake passport on a wall to remind himself of the reservation's sovereign status. He's only slowly getting back the access that was lost last spring, even though he's been with the *Pioneer* twenty-five years and has always taken the coverage of Red Lake politics seriously.

Larry Oakes, the Minneapolis *Star Tribune's* northern correspondent, described the week of March 21 as "a low point in my career." He thinks the magnitude of the story and the presence of dozens of journalists from as far away as Sweden created a competitive feeding frenzy, during which he witnessed "a lot of bad behavior by fellow journalists." When Oakes refused his editor's request that he interview the shooter's grandmother, even though she had already refused requests from two other *Star Tribune* reporters, he says he was admonished.

Tom Robertson, a reporter and producer at the local Minnesota Public Radio station, thinks all mainstream media should take Indian politics more seriously. "Read their constitution," he told me, noting that it is available online. "There are not enough checks and balances and no separation of powers." He, too, is struggling to regain the access he lost after the massacre.

Robertson is right. Red Lake needs to revise its constitution. But the pressure to do so must

come from the outside. Although the reservation is wired, there's no freedom to use the Internet to cover local issues. Mike Barrett runs a Web site called Red Lake Net News, but he has received funding from the tribal council. Truly independent reservation media are almost nonexistent, except for a few persistent souls like Bill Lawrence, who owns *The Ojibwe News/Native American Press*. The sixty-six-year-old Lawrence has been waging a free-speech battle with all eleven tribes in Minnesota for seventeen years, but especially in Red Lake, where he is an enrolled member of the Red Lake Band of Chippewa Indians. He recently was awarded a prestigious Freedom of Information award from the

### Red Lake's constitution has no free-speech clause, and pressure to change it must come from the outside.

Society of Professional Journalists for his tireless efforts to obtain tribal financial documents, especially those related to casinos.

There are other Native American journalists out there in both mainstream and alternative media trying to get attention for the story of civil rights in Indian Country. The Native American Journalists Association (NAJA) has struggled to bring the issue to public view. It deserves more support from mainstream media.

Meanwhile, the FBI has shrouded the Red Lake shootings case in secrecy and chastised the press for even asking questions. The tribal chairman's son has been sentenced in U.S. District Court for exchanging threatening messages with Jeff Weise before the shootings. His hearing was closed and his sentence is not public information. Red Lake residents are frustrated that they will never get answers to the many questions they have — not from their tribal government, their school, their feckless media — and not from the outside media that were so concerned about the sensational, but incomplete, original story.

Indian politics and sovereignty, and the issue of free speech on the reservations — those also need to be taken seriously in the press. When that happens, I will be able to stand before my Red Lake students and show, not tell, that journalism is a way they can serve their people and that it is a profession worth pursuing. ■

Louise Mengelkoch is an associate professor of journalism at Bemidji State University in Minnesota.

## DARTS & LAURELS



**LAUREL** to *The Des Moines Register*, The Associated Press, and the New York *Daily News*, for crashing the multibillion-dollar homeland security party. Using public information laws to get past the ropes, news organizations have moved beyond the early exposés of lapses at airports and seaports, their efforts now directed to following the money so frantically flung around after the 9/11 attacks. Their findings do not inspire confidence. The *Register* discovered that the state of Iowa's astoundingly long list of more than 11,000 "critical sites" designated for protection had somehow overlooked courthouses and skyscrapers while including, among other targets of similar appeal to terrorists, a windmill museum and a liquor warehouse. The AP's probe of the Small Business Administration, meanwhile, uncovered widespread abuse in its terror-relief program: many devastated Ground Zero businesses, for example, were left high and dry and desperate while banks, encouraged by the SBA to just say yes to any and all comers,

heaped millions upon millions in federally guaranteed 9/11 loans on the likes of a pet-grooming salon in Utah and Dunkin' Donuts shops all around the country, not to mention the fourteen Dairy Queens partly owned by the billionaire financier Warren Buffett. For its part, the *Daily News*, in an ambitious four-month investigation into the getting and spending of the \$21.4 billion recovery aid package for New York City, documented in voluminous detail a gold rush marked by waste, fraud, mismanagement, and the involvement of the mob in both literally and figuratively cleaning up. To all these revelations, attention is being paid. Iowa has whittled down its list of critical sites to a commonsensical 1,300. A Senate committee is inquiring into the SBA's abuse of the Terrorist Activity Relief Act. A House committee has called for a full accounting of all that New York City money. What remains to be seen, of course, is whether, as the *Daily News* hoped in its concluding editorial, we "can learn from the mistakes."

**DART** to the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, for rose-colored journalism. In the award-winning "Snapshots" column by the reporter Crocker Stephenson, the paper presents human-interest stories about local folks that capture sympathetically their struggles against adversity and sometimes produce offers of money and work — slice-of-life sketches, it now turns out, from which some of the uglier warts have been air-brushed away. That lonely guy in the wheelchair trying poignantly to engage passersby in friendly conversation, for example, has in fact been known around town for years as "the wheelchair pervert," with a record of complaints against him as long as your arm for, among other unpleasanties, harassing young women. That down-on-his-luck handyman living in a car with a woman who sells her blood for food in fact has a rap sheet ranging from the delivery of drugs to burglary and theft. And so on. Although *Milwaukee Magazine*, which highlighted Snapshots' darker spots in February, assumed in its article that many of the omissions were due to lazy reporting, Stephenson and his editors say that is not the case. On the contrary, the columnist tells CJR, the omissions

come from his deliberate dismissal of inconvenient facts "that do not further the narrative" and might discourage compassion. Details, shmetails, as long as the stories warm the reader's heart.

**DART** to Reuters, for a case of curiously conflicted coverage. Reporting in a December 8 dispatch from Tehran that in a news conference in Saudi Arabia the Iranian president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who two months before had called for Israel to be "wiped off the map," was now raising questions about the reality of the Holocaust, the worldwide news service noted diplomatically that "historians say six million Jews were killed in the Nazi Holocaust." Two hours later, a revised report appeared from which such nuanced equivocation was dropped, replaced with this straightforward statement: "The Nazis killed some 6 million Jews during their 1933-1945 rule." Oddly, however, in a next-day dispatch about the protest in Germany over the denier's wild remarks, Reuters again left open the door to debate — this time, allowing only as how

the murder of six million Jews in the Holocaust was a "widely accepted view."

**LAUREL** to the *Houston Chronicle*, for a hot series on a cold case. Twelve years after the state of Texas executed an accused murderer — a Mexican-American dropout with no previous convictions, who had proclaimed his innocence to the very end — the *Chronicle*'s Lise Olsen, acting on a tip, set out to investigate. Uncovering one hole after another — an unexplored alibi, unpursued leads, and irregular interrogations, along with an eyewitness who recanted his testimony, a co-defendant who said he'd been pressured into falsely implicating the boy, and, not least, resentful cops bent on punishing a kid they believed had gotten away with an earlier shooting of an off-duty officer in a bar fight — Olsen's postmortem left the government's case in tatters. It also left Texans wondering about the justice of their criminal justice system. Motions toward remedy came swiftly: the shaken district attorney has reopened the case, and a governor's advisory council is considering new rules for police procedures. Missing, sadly, is that gratifying photo of a former death row inmate walking away alive.

*Darts & Laurels is written by Gloria Cooper, CJR's deputy executive editor, to whom nominations should be addressed: 212-854-1887; gc15@columbia.edu.*



## STATE OF THE ART

### NORTHERN EXPOSURE

Unlike much of the rest of the world, the people of the Canadian Arctic don't need to be convinced that global warming is real: they've observed it firsthand for years. The lean transitional period between summer and winter — when the ice is too thick for seal-hunting boats to cut through but too thin for the hunters to risk driving on — is much longer than it used to be. Elders remember a time when dog teams would leave long streams of frozen breath behind them as they ran. No more.

While world governments argue over the urgency of global warming, *Nunatsiaq News*, the English-Inuktitut bilingual weekly that serves the province of Nunavut and northern Quebec, has moved beyond the debate, searching out stories that give readers a sense of why their homeland is changing and what the future might bring.

With an editorial staff of five and a weekly circulation of just over 6,000, *Nunatsiaq* might seem like the small time, but in the vast tundra of the Canadian Arctic, everything is relative. The paper's offices are in Iqaluit, Nunavut's capital city (population 6,000), which was built on a former U.S. Air Force base in the shadows of the low hills on the southern tip of Baffin Island, about 1,300 miles north of Ottawa. In winter, Iqaluit's white landscape is broken only by a few boulders that receding glaciers left behind; during the short summer, the tundra comes alive with sedge, heather, mosses, and a few dwarf willows, grown sideways from wind.

*Nunatsiaq* serves not only Iqaluit, but also forty-two other communities with a total population of about 40,000. In this region, most outposts are geographically isolated: no roads connect one community to the next, and nearly everything, including the *Nunatsiaq News*, must be brought in by plane. "In some communities, we are the only source of printed news," says a *Nunatsiaq* reporter, Jane George. "People read every word." Despite the number of communities that *Nunatsiaq* must report on, the paper nonetheless gives prominent space to coverage of climate change. For people in the Arctic, the science and politics behind the gradual heating of the far north is major news. "We don't have to tell the story of the hunter who has trouble hunting because of the thin ice," says Jim Bell, editor in chief of *Nunatsiaq*. "Our readers already know that. But what our readers do want to know is the scientific projections of where the Arctic is going to be fifty years from now."

Some news comes from the Arctic's own backyard. This past

November, *Nunatsiaq* dredged up a story from the bottom of local lakes, where a team of researchers had found heightened levels of chlorophyll, an indicator that the northern waters are getting warmer. But to report news of international research and politics, *Nunatsiaq* also looks beyond the edges of the tundra. George covers several international conferences every year, cutting through political rhetoric and scientific jargon to deliver lucid stories that matter to *Nunatsiaq's* readers. "First of all I have to make it interesting," says George. "Second of all, I have to

make it understandable. I have to understand the science backward and forward so I can explain it to someone who might only have a grade seven education." George tries to weave political nuance into her stories, as well. From the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Montreal in December, for example, she reported on a lobbying alliance between Nunavut and some Pacific island nations, areas of the world with next to nothing in common except that both



**WARM FRONT:** Residents of Iqaluit look to *Nunatsiaq News* for stories about the science and politics of climate.

have already been hard hit by the effects of climate change.

Part of Jim Bell's mission is to make readers aware of how their own habits — not just those of the rest of the world — contribute to global warming. Because of its harsh climate, Nunavut consumes almost five times the national Canadian average of fuel per capita, thus pouring more carbon into the atmosphere. In a 2003 article, the reporter Dwane Wilkin wrote about one piece of the problem: the far north receives government subsidies for fuel, and those subsidies create the illusion that fuel is less expensive than it really is. "If generous government subsidies didn't exist, it would probably be cheaper — and a whole lot more efficient — to stoke home furnaces with wads of \$20 bills," Wilkin wrote.

The next few months, Bell says, will be an interesting time for climate-change stories in the Arctic. The newly elected Canadian Conservative party, whose power base is in the oil-rich province of Alberta, has not said much about the Kyoto Accord on Global Warming. The Nunavut government has just raised quotas on polar bear hunting, despite warnings from scientists, who say global warming has caused the polar bear population to dwindle. Then there's the ongoing story of changes in behavior. Seal hunters, for example, have begun to check satellite images of ice to determine where it is thick enough to hunt. "The effects have been so gradual and so subtle that people are in some ways already adapting to it," says Bell. And that news — that global warming is quietly becoming part of Arctic culture — might be the most interesting story of all.

— Kiera Butler

ANDRE FORGET/ARF/GETTY IMAGES

# CURRENTS

## WHAT FITZSIMONS DIDN'T SAY

With Knight Ridder on the market, Tribune's Dennis FitzSimons has supplanted Tony Ridder as the media world's most embattled CEO. Wall Street is grumbling about Tribune's sorry showing in '05 (anemic stock price, embarrassing circulation scandal, a belated \$1 billion IRS bill, etc.), and FitzSimons is scrambling to convince investors that he can wring more money out of Tribune's properties. In December he made his case to the all-important analysts at conferences in New York. He spoke of Tribune's "important journalistic mission." As a public service, CJR supplies below some of the missing context.

**Said:** "Our focus on cost reduction, given our current revenue environment, has been intense."

**Unsaid:** Despite all the sky-is-falling rhetoric, Tribune remains enormously profitable. Yes, newspapers are suffering through a difficult transition, but Tribune's operating profit margin for 2005 is over 20 percent. Exxon Mobil, on the other hand, which just reported the highest profit in U.S. history, has an operating margin of 17 percent.

**Said:** "We are local media."

**Unsaid:** So of course they killed Chicago's 115-year-old City News Service, shuttered eleven community papers owned by *The Morning Call* in Allentown, Pennsylvania, and decimated *Newsday*'s New York City desk — all part of a companywide drive-by that netted 900 jobs and counting (800 from the publishing side, while the ad sales force grew). It's hard to see how this will sharpen "Tribune's edge," which FitzSimons told *The New York Times* recently is "its unique ability to cover its local communities like no one else can."

**Said:** "We'll continue looking to serve our readers in ways that deliver the most value to them, so we'll be investing more in research to determine what's important to our readers."

**Unsaid:** The debate over how to balance what readers want with what they need to be educated participants in a democracy is real, and FitzSimons may actually believe, as he told *The New Yorker* last year, that "journalists make 'too many fake arguments' about how newspaper companies are trying to 'dumb down.'" But solving the declining readership puzzle need not — and must not — mean wholesale surrender to the entertainment/diversion aspect of journalism.

**Said:** "We're also redeploying resources and re-engineering processes, especially in publishing."

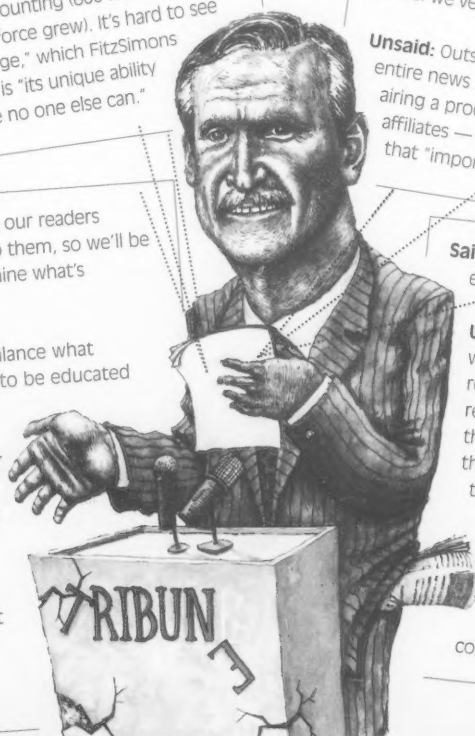
**Unsaid:** By way of example, FitzSimons mentioned Tribune's newly consolidated D.C. bureau, and how it will save money while simultaneously improving coverage of Washington "through greater collaboration." The former is a given, the latter is dubious. The number of journalists in this new bureau has been reduced, dramatically in some cases (*Newsday* went from fourteen to five, for instance, while *The Hartford Courant* went from five to one). And the kind of journalism the nation needs out of Washington — investigative, explanatory — is both labor- and time-intensive.

**Said:** "Our stations in Philadelphia and San Diego have moved to the news outsourcing model we've used successfully in Miami."

**Unsaid:** Outsourcing meant laying off the entire news staff in Philly and San Diego and airing a product produced by local NBC affiliates — not exactly a commitment to that "important journalistic mission."

**Said:** "Our tradition of journalistic excellence isn't going to change..."

**Unsaid:** After the *Los Angeles Times* won five Pulitzers in 2004 — a record for the paper — the staff received bupkis from corporate on this historic achievement. Instead, then-editor John Carroll got word that the home office was displeased with the *Times*'s revenues, and was demanding deep cuts. Carroll ultimately quit; Dean Baquet, his successor, will need guts and luck in the coming budget battles.





## TRADEMARKCHECKLIST

This *Trademark Checklist* is a handy guide to some of the best known federally registered U.S. trademarks. This list is a sample of the International Trademark Association's (INTA) list of nearly 3,000 trademarks and service marks with their generic terms.

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**747** airplanes and structural parts thereof  
**Absolut** vodka  
**Academy Awards** annual award program  
**Ajax** soap and household cleaner  
**Atkins Diet** food supplements  
**Balderdash** word and board games  
**Band-Aid** adhesive bandages  
**Black Hawk** military helicopter  
**Blistex** medicated lip ointment  
**Bon Bons** ice cream  
**Books on Tape** pre-recorded audio cassette tapes  
**BOTOX** injections for pharmaceutical and cosmetic purposes  
**Brita** water filtering units  
**Bubble Wrap** cellular cushioning packaging material  
**Budget** renting and leasing of motor vehicles  
**Butterball** poultry  
**Craftmatic** electric adjustable bed  
**Diet Coke** soft drink  
**Doc Martens** footwear  
**Dockers** clothing, footwear, accessories  
**Dogpile** online search engine  
**Dreamweaver** computer software  
**Duraflame** artificial fireplace logs  
**eBay** online auction services  
**Egg Beaters** egg substitute  
**Electrolux** vacuum cleaners and parts  
**Express Mail** delivery services by mail  
**E-ZPass** collection of tolls using an electronic system  
**Febreze** fabric deodorizer  
**Filofax** loose-leaf diaries and agenda books  
**Frigidaire** appliances  
**Frisbee** toy flying saucer  
**Gardenburger** vegetable-based meat substitutes  
**Glow Stick** toy lightsticks  
**Glucometer** blood glucose meters & reagents  
**iTunes** audio data computer software  
**Jaws of Life** rescue tools

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The *Trademark Checklist* is a quick reference guide to assist authors, writers, journalists, editors, proofreaders and fact checkers with proper trademark usage. Here are a few important usage guidelines that will help prevent letters of complaint from trademark owners:

- Trademarks are proper adjectives and should be capitalized and followed by a generic noun or phrase
- Trademarks should not be pluralized or used in the possessive form
- Trademarks are never verbs

**Jeep** all-terrain vehicles  
**Kleenex** tissues, napkins  
**Laundromat** electric laundry washers  
**Lycra** spandex fibers  
**Mach3** razors, razor blades  
**MapQuest** online access to geographic information  
**McAfee** computer virus software  
**MetaCrawler** online search engine  
**Metallica** entertainment services, clothing, stickers  
**MetroCard** magnetically coded metro fare cards  
**NASCAR** National Association for Stock Car Autoracing, Inc., stock car and automobile racing  
**Netflix** video rental and retail services  
**Nexis** data storage and retrieval  
**Outlook** computer programs  
**Palm** personal and handheld computers  
**Phish Food** ice cream  
**Photoshop** computer software  
**Ping-Pong** game played with rackets and balls  
**Pixar** entertainment services in the field of film and television  
**Plasticine** modeling paste  
**Play-Doh** modeling compound  
**Realtor** real estate brokerage services, member of the National Association of Realtors  
**Red Cross** charitable fundraising, blood banks  
**Red Hots** candy  
**Retin A** acne preparations  
**Ritalin** stimulant (methylphenidate)  
**Rite Aid** retail drug stores services  
**Sheetrock** plaster wall board  
**Silly Putty** modeling clay  
**Spark Notes** study guides in the field of literature  
**Spinning** stationary bicycle training and instruction  
**Sterno** solid fuel  
**Tae Bo** instructional teaching services for aerobics & martial arts  
**Taser** non-lethal firearm  
**Teflon** fluorine-containing resins, coatings  
**Telecopier** fax machines  
**Thermos** bottles, jars, decanters, flasks  
**TiVo** subscription television broadcasting services  
**TLC** cable television network broadcasting services  
**U-Haul** truck and automobile trailer rentals  
**VirusScan** computer programs for data integrity and security  
**WebCrawler** online search engine  
**Wite-Out** correction fluid  
**Xbox** video game system

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## RICHARD GIZBERT'S WAR

*Richard Gizbert covered conflicts extensively (Chechnya, Bosnia) as a London-based correspondent for ABC News. In June 2004, he was abruptly let go after turning down assignments in Afghanistan and Iraq, despite the network's insistence that such dangerous posts are strictly voluntary. Gizbert filed suit in London for unfair dismissal, and this winter he won a strongly worded verdict in labor court against ABC, which the network has since appealed. CJR's Kevin Friedl spoke with Gizbert shortly after the dangers of war coverage were again underscored by the injuries to ABC's Bob Woodruff and Doug Vogt.*

**In what capacity did you initially work for ABC?**

I came as a foreign correspondent. I did war zones, like most people do, for four or five years. Gradually, as my kids got older and I was feeling less invulnerable, I drifted away from it. By the time Kosovo happened, I let it be known that I didn't want to go there. The company was fine with it at the time; they'd seen it happen many times before.



**Do you think your case has relieved some of the pressure on reporters to cover conflicts?**

I have absolutely no doubt. When I was fired, I was one of four correspondents in the London bureau. Three of them went to Baghdad. Since I raised the case, all three of those other correspondents have at one time bowed out of the Iraq assignment. I understand why those guys couldn't testify on my behalf, but it would be nice if they bought me a beer.

**Was it explicit that you would no longer cover wars?**

In 2002, I signed a contract on the explicit understanding that there would be no war-zone work. About three or four months later I was asked by Marcus Wilford, the London bureau chief, if I'd go to Afghanistan. I turned him down. He said, "Richard, you ought to know there is some unhappiness in New York about this," which kind of flummoxed me. I turned down two Iraq assignments and an Afghanistan assignment and then on June 9, 2004, Marcus sat me down and informed me that they were terminating me and they were going to replace me with someone who went to war zones.

**Will high-profile incidents, like the injuries to Bob Woodruff and Doug Vogt, prompt changes in the ways the press covers Iraq?**

I think it's inevitable. We've got to find a different model to cover this war. NBC was smart to go out and hire someone like Richard Engel, who is an Arabic speaker, does six weeks in and two weeks out, and is completely committed to the story. You can always find correspondents who are young and keen and want to do the story for their career, for the story, or both. But the old rotate-everybody-in, everybody-does-their-fair-share model, simply cannot apply to a place like Baghdad.

## LANGUAGE CORNER

### TAKING ISSUE

**T**hrough his pain, Robert Brown found a bit of humor.

"One day will you please address the 'issue/problem' issue (er, problem)," his note said. "In my dictionary, I don't see 'problem' as a definition for 'issue.' Everyone is using 'issue' in a problematic way (when will there be 'issuematic?')."

The e-mail from Mr. Brown — who said he lives in New York City, owns an art gallery, and writes about gastronomy on the side — touched a nerve. Most fads are ignorable, but the "issue" fad has been as sweeping as any in memory. The word is used in countless sloppy ways. A weatherman warns of "cloudiness is-

sues." A sports announcer notes a team's "penalty issues." And from the print world: "health issues, such as high blood sugar"; the college whose chief, according to a news article, "wants the mold issue resolved"; radio stations that "bombarded their listeners with the issue."

As a standard-English alternative to the wimpy "issue," we should certainly consider the straightforward "problem." Or "concern" or "weakness" or "question" or "topic" or "matter" or . . .

— Evan Jenkins

**A lot more about writing is in Language Corner at CJR's Web site, [www.cjr.org](http://www.cjr.org), under "Journalism Tools."**

**807:** Minimum number of journalists who were arrested worldwide in 2005.

**100:** Decrease from the year before.

**59:** Percent of the 150 journalists who died on assignment last year who were murdered.

**8, 5, 4:** Months, respectively, that three Iraqi journalists working for Reuters were held in Abu Ghraib without charges before being released this winter.

**39:** Minimum number of journalists who have been abducted in Iraq since 2004.

**79:** Number of newspapers banned in China in 2005.

**124:** Number of appearances Senator John McCain has made on Sunday morning talk shows (on ABC, CBS, and NBC) since 1997.

**5:** Number of McCain appearances, per year, over those of any other political figure.

**36:** Combined number of Freedom of Information Act requests placed with the Pentagon by *USA Today*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *The New York Times* between October 2000 and February 2005.

**73, 42, 34:** Pentagon FOIA requests by The Associated Press, the *Los Angeles Times*, and *The Washington Post*, respectively, during that period.

**6:** Number of media outlets, including MSNBC, *The New Yorker*, and *Newsday* that Bill O'Reilly has placed on his list of "media operations that traffic in defamation."

Sources: RSF, International Federation of Journalists, CPJ, Reuters, AP, Media Matters, Raw Story, [billoreilly.com](http://billoreilly.com)

# THE AMERICAN NEWSROOM

**BLOOMBERG**

New York City

PHOTO BY SEAN HEMMERLE





**Bloomberg**

Iraqis dig up much of the news we get  
about their country. To do so  
they live secret lives, filled with danger.

## THE STRINGERS

BY PAUL McLEARY

Just days before I met Salih in Iraq this past January, he became a wanted man. A stringer for *The Washington Post* in Tikrit, he had helped report a story that ran on January 13, fingering local Tikriti officials who the story said had looted a complex of palaces built by Saddam Hussein.

The story, like so much else that has gone wrong in Iraq, has its roots in what was supposed to be a sign of progress. Last November, the American military in Tikrit made a big show of handing the palaces over to the Iraqis. Some time later, after hearing that the palaces had been looted, Salih was one of several *Post* stringers assigned to cover the story. After seeing the destruction firsthand he sent word back to the *Post*, which ran a piece that named local Iraqi forces and the head of the local security force, Jassam Jabara, as the culprits. Jabara, who had a history with Salih from an earlier story, was not pleased. As a result, according to Salih's sources, Jabara placed a \$50,000 bounty on his head. Salih fled Tikrit and has yet to return.

Salih's troubles, while extreme, are echoed in the lives of many Iraqi stringers working for Western news outlets across this unlucky country. As Iraq slips further into what seems an endless spasm of bloodletting, many Western reporters

have been forced to hunker down, only leaving their guarded compounds for short periods and only then with a translator, a driver, and at least one bodyguard in tow. As a result, they have come to rely more and more on Iraqi stringers to gather information. This isn't to say Western reporters

don't get out — they do, as much as possible — but given the violent reality of Iraq, there are times where it's just not feasible for them to travel.

For the Iraqi stringers who risk their lives and often are forced to hide what they do from friends and family, typically without even the glory of a byline in return, the answer to the question of why they do it is complicated. In a country impoverished by decades of war, criminal dictatorship, and international sanctions, money was often the principal draw, at least initially. Drawn from the ranks of college-educated pro-

fessionals — accountants, professors, doctors, computer experts — the stringers can sometimes more than double what the average Iraqi earns in postwar Iraq.

But for many, after months, and now even years of working in their new profession, this blunt economic incentive seems to have given way to a deeper — even passionate — appreciation for journalism's ability to tell important stories and, sometimes, make a difference. As Yousif, a twen-



RAYMOND VERDAGUIER



ty-four-year-old stringer who asked me not to include his last name or his employer, put it, "Americans have to know how the Iraqis are suffering. There are millions of stories out there, but the problem is the safety. It's dangerous to go out there and get the story."

Yes, it is. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, of the sixty-one journalists killed in Iraq from the beginning of the war in March 2003 through February 2006, forty-two were native Iraqis. In addition, twenty-three media workers — drivers, translators, and so forth — have been killed in Iraq. One of the most recent casualties was Allan Enwiyah, who worked as a translator for Jill Carroll, the *Christian Science Monitor* freelancer, and who was shot to death during her kidnapping on January 7. Yousif and Enwiyah were friends.

**T**he *Post's* Salih is the only Iraqi stringer I met who had worked as a reporter before the war. A thickset man of thirty, with a shaved head and large, expressive eyes, he came to the *Post* a little over a year ago. At the time he was working at one of the numerous papers that sprang up in the wake of the invasion, and heard the *Post* was looking for local help.

Speaking through a translator in a fortified house with armed guards out front, he told the story of his ongoing struggle with Jassam Jabara. It started in August 2005, when Salih helped report a story about a man who died in custody, only five hours after being arrested by Jabara's security forces. According to Salih, a day before the story ran, Jabara's cousin visited him and urged him to pull it, suggesting that otherwise, "Jassam has the ability to make you disappear." The story ran the next day, and Jabara complained to the governor of Tikrit, urging him to have Salih arrested. The governor refused. Three days later, Salih said, "a black BMW stopped in front of me and two men jumped out, one holding a pistol and one holding a metal bar, and tried to force me inside the car. I kept pushing back and they beat me with the gun and the metal bar." He showed me thick scars behind his ear and on his back, which he said came from the beating.

Luckily, some locals who knew him came to his aid, and the men fled. Just a few days later, he says, while he was walking near the governor's office, a man jumped out of a car and opened fire on him with an automatic pistol. Salih ducked, and the shooter's aim was high.

Because of stories like this, the Iraqis who report for Western news outlets are forced to lead painful and dangerous double lives. One woman, whom I'll call Salama, told me that although she has been working for American newspapers for over three years, her friends and neighbors don't

know about it. "My colleagues here don't tell their neighbors they work for an American news agency either," she said. As we sat in one of the hotel rooms that her news organization occupies in Baghdad — there are armed guards in the lobby and security in the room next door — she told me that she explains her long days at the office to neighbors and friends by telling them she works for a financial company with branches around the world, so she has to work late because of the time differences.

The strain of this dual life has taken a toll on Salama and her family, and while she was rather soft-spoken and polite, her frustration was obvious. "To get a story you have to risk your life," she said matter-of-factly. "Sometimes I wonder if the people in the U.S. really understand how much we go through in order to write the story." To underscore that, she told of being pushed from behind by an Iraqi man while covering a story with a Western reporter, of being caught in a firefight in Sadr City, Baghdad's sprawling and violent slum, and of being threatened by a group of insurgents while out reporting. Yet in a country with few opportunities, journalism is a way to make a living, and to stay involved. "We never know when something could happen to us," she said. "But then at the same time, I cannot stop living."

Like Salama, Yousif is discreet about his work. "Ninety-five percent of my friends — close friends — don't know I work with journalists," said Yousif, who is fluent in English and began working for his American employer as the bureau's IT manager. "It's very dangerous to tell people you're doing this. I tell them I'm working for a computer company."

It's widely accepted that the insurgents know the handful of hotels and compounds where many journalists stay, and Yousif said he takes precautions on the way to and from work. Typically, he walks a good distance from the compound before hailing a taxi, and when coming to work he asks to be dropped off in different places and then walks the final blocks to the compound. But he is always wary, and pays close attention to the drivers. Once, a taxi picked him up near the compound, he said, and the driver seemed very interested in the neighborhood and who was staying at nearby hotels. A few days later, the same taxi driver picked Yousif up near his home, far from the compound, and started asking the same questions, so Yousif told him to take him somewhere else entirely, and got a new taxi.

Beyond matters of life and death, the Iraqi stringers face more mundane frustrations. Yousif, for instance, is hungry to do more writing, but says that "They've only mentioned my name in about five articles, because most of the journalists want to do their own stories." Western journalists

do give him plenty of advice, however, "about how to look at the stories from a different angle, what is important, and what the people outside Iraq are concerned about." That last part is sometimes the hardest. One of the biggest challenges, Yousif said, has been "trying to think like an American guy, and think what Americans might be interested in." Especially at first, he said, he would pitch stories to the reporters that he gleaned from conversations he overheard on the street or things he read on insurgent Web sites, only to be told that his ideas were probably only interesting to Iraqis, and not necessarily to an American audience.

Another common thread in my conversations with the stringers was the immense distrust, bred of fear, that Iraqis have for one another these days. One evening, while we sat in the living room of Yousif's employer's guarded compound, he told of the time he bumped into a friend at Baghdad University while he was there with an American reporter. Since his friend thinks he works for a computer company, Yousif quickly made up a story about being there to broker a deal with the university to supply computers. "He didn't buy it," Yousif said with a laugh, "but he didn't see the journalist, so I escaped." The friend, he explained, thinks journalists are spies for the Americans. "Iraqis always think that there is a conspiracy against them."

Critics of the press's coverage of the war in Iraq often grumble that American journalists are obsessed with reporting "bad news," while ignoring the "good." To many of the Iraqis working for the U.S. media, this seems irrelevant, even absurd. Ahmed, an owlish thirty-one-year-old who taught poetry at a local university before the war and who now works for an American newspaper chain, shrugged and said, "It's true that journalists here are mostly writing about the bad. But when you have a hotel being built in Najaf and a kidnapping of a female journalist in Baghdad, what are you going to do? The bad news eclipses the good news."

Assad, who works for an American magazine, has an even darker view. "There is no peace, there is no reconstruction, there is no rebuilding to write about," he said, over lunch at his employer's compound. "I have only seen the reconstruction of the Green Zone, and that is for the Americans." An amiable matter-of-fact guy, Assad was an accountant and an English teacher before the war, and has worked for a handful of European and American publications, beginning with a Danish newspaper just before the war began. He said he would like to go back to being an accountant — preferably in the United States — but for the moment, his work as a journalist pays better.

Of the Iraqi stringers I met, Assad might be the exception in that he doesn't necessarily see his future in journalism. Despite the danger, the secrecy, the frustration at both the muddled U.S. occupation and the desire for more autonomy in their work, most of the stringers seemed intent on sticking with their new careers, even if that means leaving Iraq. Yousif and Ahmed both told me they had come to see journalism as the only way to properly tell the story of their country, and both are applying for journalism scholarships overseas.

For now, neither would consider working for Iraqi publications, which they dismiss as little more than mouthpieces for specific political or religious groups. Yousif said he would like to start his own

To Iraqis working for the U.S. press, the charge that media ignore the "good news" from their nation seems absurd.

magazine in Iraq one day, using the tools he has learned from Western journalists, while Ahmed takes a more expansive view. "I think journalism that is independent and objective can promote democracy and can promote a solid political standing in Iraq," he said. "If we can obtain these conditions, I would work for an Iraqi publication. That's the main target for me, to work for such a place."

Even Salih, who goes to work every day knowing that people want to kill him, said journalism is the only way he can help the world understand what is happening to his country. But he is frustrated by the danger, and by what he says is the lack of interest on the part of American and Iraqi officials in investigating the crime and corruption that pervades so much of postwar Iraq. In a startling statement, he said that even under Saddam, if a journalist wrote something accusatory about a government official, the allegations would be investigated. "You used to be able to write about, say, smuggling, but now if you do, you may be killed," he told me. "Is that the right way to tell the truth in this country? The American forces are supporting such people as Jassam Jabara, and when stories like mine run, they never investigate, and these guys are becoming worse — they're becoming untouchables." ■

*Paul McLeary is a reporter for CJR Daily. His recent series of dispatches from Iraq can be read at [www.cjr-daily.org/dispatches\\_from\\_iraq/](http://www.cjr-daily.org/dispatches_from_iraq/).*

# ANNOUNCING

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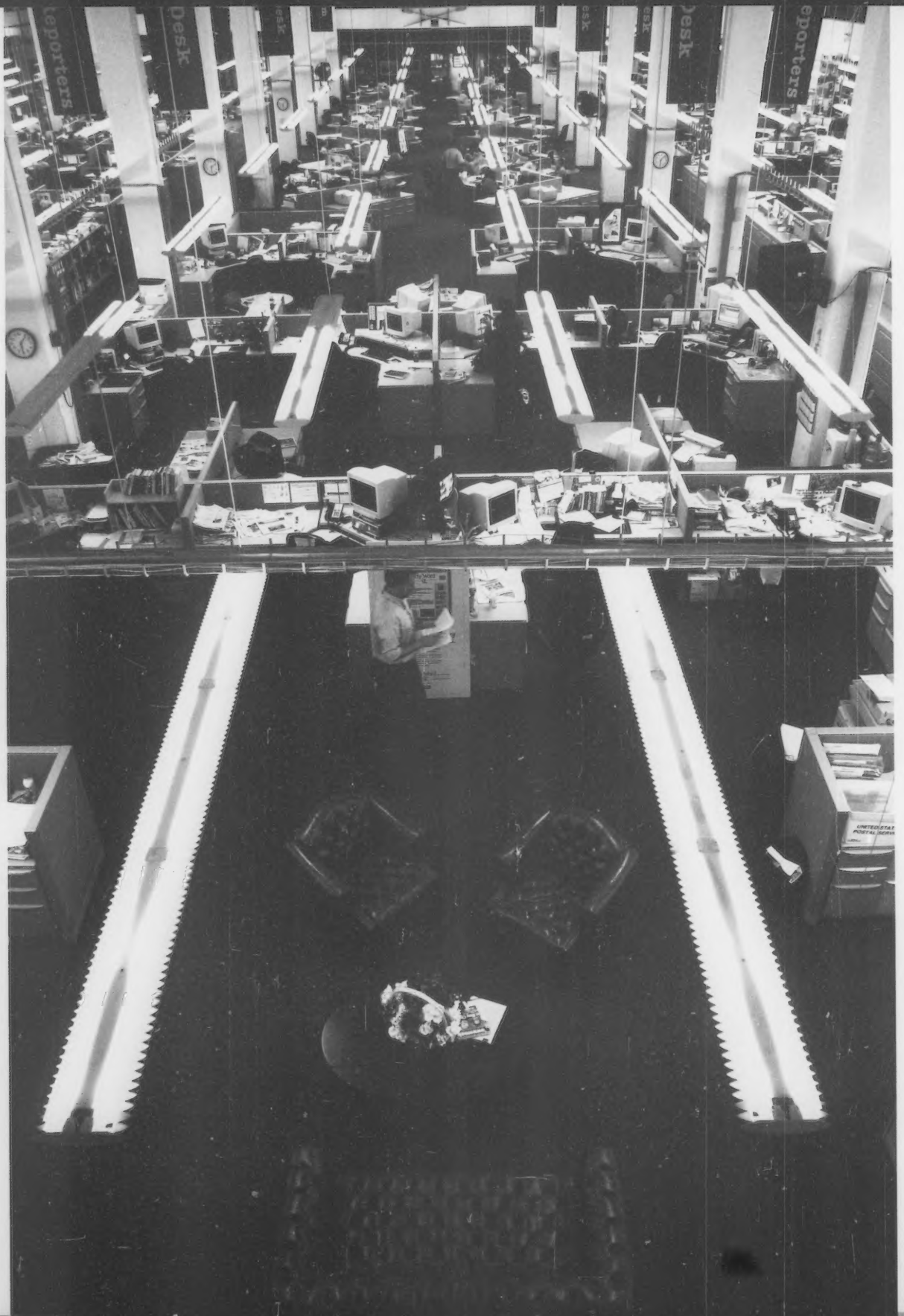
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## *The Philadelphia Inquirer* and the Fate of American Newspapers

# LOOKING FOR LIGHT

BY MICHAEL SHAPIRO

### 1. Phantom Menace

The events that would transform life at *The Philadelphia Inquirer* from the merely disheartening into the profoundly terrifying began to unfold shortly after 3 o'clock on the afternoon of last November 1 when Sandra Long, a deputy managing editor, appeared outside the glass wall of managing editor Anne Gordon's office waving a small piece of paper. Long did not look well.

Gordon, who carries herself with an air of relentless purposefulness, was in the midst of explaining why the impending loss of 15 percent of the *Inquirer's* editorial staff was not nearly so dire a situation as most everyone else in her beleaguered newsroom believed. "Putting out a great newspaper has nothing to do with numbers," she was saying. "This is an idea game now." Just then Long poked her head in the door. Above her hung a sign that read, "Fight the Good Fight."

"There is," she said, "an emergency." Her voice possessed the gravity of someone bringing word of a loved one's death.

Gordon excused herself and followed Long out

into the vast and airy newsroom, where people were still caught between putting out the next day's newspaper and deciding whether the time had come to apply for a buyout and leave.

Gordon returned a few minutes later and said, without obvious concern or alarm, that the largest holder of stock in the *Inquirer's* corporate parent, Knight Ridder, was demanding that the company be sold in order to boost the stock's sagging value. With that, she rose and strode back through the newsroom and into the page-one meeting to decide what the *Inquirer's* 357,000 subscribers would read the following morning: an update on the stalled talks in the city's day-old transit strike; analyses of a possible Jon Corzine administration in Trenton and a Samuel Alito term on the Supreme Court; and, tucked back on the business pages, the *Inquirer's* story about the perilous turn in its own already unsettled fortunes set in motion by a little-known man from Naples, Florida, named Bruce S. Sherman.

By this time the story told and retold in journalistic circles about *The Philadelphia Inquirer* had assumed a familiarity that bordered on the monotonous: a once dreadful and then brilliant newspaper

— *seventeen Pulitzers in eighteen years!* — that might have been great still had it not been for the endless meddling, cutting, and demands for ever greater profits from its corporate masters. The *Inquirer*, it was said in a tone used to describe a handsome friend who has not aged well, was not what it was. Where once it was sparky and filled with surprises — to say nothing of those great, Pulitzer-destined heaves — its pages were now too often filled with dutiful pieces relaying word of further steps in bureaucratic processes. Dispatches from overseas and from across the nation that once carried *Inquirer* bylines now came via the wires. No one was suggesting that the *Inquirer* had become a bad newspaper, far from it. But it had become duller — yet another newspaper whose occa-

not twenty-five more positions, as had been expected, nor fifty, as had been feared. Seventy-five people — that 15 percent — would have to go, which, in all likelihood, meant not only buyouts but, for the first time, layoffs. The room fell silent.

And soon Bennett would do a curious thing. A few weeks later, on the day in September that she and Natoli gathered the entire staff to inform them of the cuts, she told NPR that the magnitude of that loss represented, of all things, “a gift for us.” Smaller cuts, she explained, could have been managed by stretching what resources remained. But not so in losing seventy-five people. “We’re going,” she said, “to have to reinvent ourselves.”

With that she established several committees charged with assessing where the paper stood, and

## The *Inquirer*, it was said in a tone used to describe a handsome friend who has not aged well, was not what it was.

sional highs seemed to come at ever longer intervals. That judgment was rendered both from afar and from within the paper’s white tower of a home on North Broad Street.

The *Inquirer* had gone through three editors in the last six years, had by last summer seen its newsroom staff already reduced since 1999 from 600 to 500, and perhaps saddest of all, had gone from being perhaps the most alluring and electric place in the business to work to yet another newsroom where some young reporters wondered whether they would have been wiser to have gone to law school.

And the *Inquirer* was an economic disappointment to Knight Ridder. The paper was still profitable, and still posted margins in the low teens, and together with its sister paper, the tabloid *Philadelphia Daily News*, generated more revenue — \$500 million, with about \$50 million in profits — than any other papers in the chain. But that revenue was declining, and given a continuing drop in circulation and advertising, the *Inquirer*, the largest of Knight Ridder’s thirty-two daily papers, had become another drag on the company’s stock, whose value had fallen by 20 percent in the last year and a half.

So it was that weeks before almost anyone at the *Inquirer* heard the name Bruce Sherman, the paper’s editor, Amanda Bennett, had emerged from a meeting with her publisher, Joe Natoli, ridden the elevator down from the twelfth floor, and walked into a room where her senior editors had gathered to discuss, once again, how best to adjust to yet another round of cost-saving buyouts. Bennett looked ashen. The paper, she announced, would need to eliminate

where it might be taken. The *Inquirer*, she made clear, could no longer go on as it was. What it might become, however, was far from clear.

Reinvention was not a novel idea at the *Inquirer*. The paper had been reinvented time and again throughout its long history. This attempt, however, would be carried out in an altogether more difficult time for the American newspaper. It was as if a dark cloud had descended over the news business, a mood exacerbated by the journalistic inclination to see the worst in things. On the same day in September that the *Inquirer* announced its cuts, The New York Times Company said it was reducing its newsroom staff by forty-five and that of *The Boston Globe* by thirty-five. Though newspapers remained profitable, and great sources of cash, the coming of the Internet (and with it, free news and classified advertising), the declining readership among the young, and the feared migration of advertisers away from print, had left reporters and editors wondering whether they might be the ones left to turn out the lights.

The *Inquirer* could no longer afford all the many things it had once offered its readers — a meaty Sunday magazine, series and stories from abroad that no one else had, a seemingly inexhaustible stream of investigations. Fewer people felt compelled to subscribe, and those advertisers who still saw value in the *Inquirer* knew it. As more of its readers departed the city for the suburbs, the *Inquirer* could not seem to settle on a way to lure them away from suburban papers that offer all the local news any reader could want. Nothing seemed to stop the stock price from slipping and the prof-

its from dropping and the mood in the embattled newsroom from darkening.

So the fall brought competing imperatives to the *Inquirer*. The staff — and that of the *Daily News*, which was losing twenty-five positions — had until November 4 to apply for a buyout, and those who applied had until the following week to change their minds. The last day of work for those who chose to leave would be November 18 and, with the gallows humor that invariably accompanies dark moments in the news business, the editors on the committee overseeing the transition joked about the prospect of preparing seventy-five farewell mock front pages. In the meantime, Carl Lavin, the deputy managing editor for news, and Nancy Cooney, the metropolitan editor, were dispatched to the newsroom and to the paper's suburban bureaus to spread the word that good and important work could still be done at a stripped-down *Inquirer*. The paper, they were quick to point out, had weeks earlier seized upon and run with a grand jury report identifying predatory priests, devoting pages and many reporters as the story churned and grew — the way the *Inquirer* had done things in the good days. Still, people were anxious, Lavin later said, "about everything. About the paper — what am I going to do? About whether this is the kind of paper they want to work at." He and Cooney did their best to be reassuring. Cooney felt that people wanted to believe them.

Meanwhile, the Sunday editor, Tom McNamara, conducted the grim head count, an assignment that he had actually begun in June when Bennett asked him to put together a report on possible staff reductions. McNamara, who also oversaw features, had come to the paper from *USA Today* five years earlier and brought with him ideas about story length, graphics, and content that at times stood in direct refutation to the ethos that had once made the *Inquirer* soar. His view of that ethos, which he believed existed in "a time warp," did not make him especially popular — "I was sort of the devil," he joked. But now, some people confessed to him that after years of late nights they wanted to be home in time to have dinner with their children, and that perhaps a buyout might bring the chance to start at something new. Others wondered whether all the cutting was a harbinger of ever-gloomier times for newspapers. As he walked along the long rows of desks that stretched almost a city block, he would find himself thinking: "he's gone; she's gone." He did not believe that the cutting was at an end. He would pass people in the stairwell, say hello, only to be greeted with silence.

By the afternoon of November 1, McNamara was calculating that perhaps forty to forty-five people would apply for the buyout. If he was right, the *Inquirer* would have no choice but to fire thirty people. His section alone stood to lose an art critic, as

well as his pop music, movie, and theater writers. Like every other editor at the *Inquirer*, he could try to find replacements from those who were staying, or simply let the jobs vanish.

McNamara's calculations, however, proved well off the mark. By the end of the week ninety-four people would apply for the buyout. But then that was after the newsroom learned that Sherman, CEO of Private Capital Management LLC, was after Knight Ridder to sell. By the end of the week the chain's second and third largest shareholders had joined him in demanding a sale; on the day Sherman's letter was released Knight Ridder's stock rose by \$4.62 to \$58 a share.

## 2. Blue Skies

Amanda Bennett had been editor of the *Inquirer* for almost three years and had yet to truly make the paper her own. She had come to Philadelphia from the *Lexington Herald-Leader*, where she had been a well-regarded editor. She had run investigative projects — and helped win a Pulitzer — as a managing editor at *The Oregonian*, and before that had spent more than twenty years as a reporter for *The Wall Street Journal*, where she had also been part of a Pulitzer-winning team. She had written five books. Bennett was fifty-one then and projected a buoyant eagerness. The staff of the *Inquirer* had greeted her appointment with great delight, having grown ever more disenchanted during the seventeen-month tenure of Walker Lundy, whose legacy included sitting in his office on the night of a primary watching not the news but *Judging Amy*. Lundy had left the *Inquirer* with the vague explanation that his financial planner had told him he was in a position to retire comfortably. Bennett was welcomed as a journalist of accomplishment and vision who might even lead the paper back to what it had been when Richard Ben Cramer's return from the Middle East and his Pulitzer were celebrated by bringing a camel into the newsroom.

But that transformation had not yet happened. And though no one could reasonably blame Bennett alone for the malaise that afflicted her newsroom — her arrival was preceded by buyouts in 2000 and 2001 — the excitement that had attended her appointment had largely disappeared. Bennett remained an enigma to the staff. Though people did not question her journalistic skills, they nonetheless whispered to anyone who asked about her carelessness with her words, a tendency she was quick to acknowledge. (She had felt compelled, for instance, to explain to the staff that she had not intended to criticize the paper when, in a presentation to Knight Ridder executives, she used a series of cartoons, one of which showed a homeless man sleeping on a bench with a newspaper over his head; this was meant to show the executives what *they* thought of

the *Inquirer*.) She was often absent, closeted in meetings with the business side, trying to manage the newsroom's ever more difficult finances. The staff wanted more from her. By her own admission, she had not yet been able to give enough.

Yet now, at the darkest moment in memory, Bennett had emerged and declared that the time had come to be bold. She established nine committees in the hope that those reporters and editors who had chosen to stay might help devise a new path for the *Inquirer*. One committee explored the possibilities of the Web, and another considered

imagining a happy and successful *Inquirer*, and creating a narrative that told how this transformation took place. Most important, the groups would be asked to explain what values animated the newsroom of this new *Inquirer*. He asked that they be optimistic, not cynical.

Still, he could well understand the impulse toward the latter. As it happened, Satullo himself was not necessarily sure he wanted to stay, though he had a daughter who was thinking seriously of a career in journalism, which made him wonder what she might think if he walked away. He had arrived

## Knight Ridder's view held that those who once lived in the city abandoned what interest they had in things that did not bear directly on their lives the moment they relocated to a split-level home.

the unpleasant task of stretching resources — deciding whether, say, the cuts in copy editors necessitated creating a universal copy desk, or whether it would still be feasible to send both a reporter and photographer to cover so many high school football games.

The most intriguing work, however, was being done by the committee mandated to envision the *Inquirer* of the future. The committee was chaired by Chris Satullo, the editorial-page editor. Satullo was fifty-two, bright, serious, and respected in the newsroom. Bennett and Anne Gordon had turned to Satullo after the staff cuts were announced in September, and asked him to preside over a retreat the following week at which newsroom managers could begin making sense of what was about to happen to the paper.

He was a logical choice; Satullo had been an advocate of civic journalism and, in addition to opening his page to debate among ever more "community voices," he had presided over public debates on such issues as the future of school design. The weekend after the cuts were announced, Satullo devised a broad agenda for the retreat: What, he would ask his colleagues, should the *Inquirer* be in 2015?

The editors gathered on September 26. Bagels and coffee were served and Satullo, who had been nervous the night before, knowing how the mood would be, explained how the day would work. He understood that while it was important for people to air frustrations, extended venting would do little good. And so, he asked them to think about the future. He divided the forty assembled editors into small groups and charged them with two tasks:

at the paper in 1989, and his tenure had coincided with the paper's decline in circulation, as well as in reputation. This had not surprised him. "I'd been here six months," he later said, "and I had this nagging feeling that this paper is not nearly as good as the people who work here think it is."

The 1990s had been a period of dramatically fewer prizes as well as seemingly interminable discussions about how best to serve the core of the paper's readers, who now lived in the suburbs. The *Inquirer's* circulation map was an editor's nightmare: one big city and two states — Pennsylvania and New Jersey — that included scores of municipalities and more than 200 school districts. Where once the paper had seen itself as a legitimate competitor to *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, it now struggled to do battle with some twenty suburban dailies, some of which were quite strong. At turns since the 1980s the paper had offered its suburban readers special weekly and then biweekly inserts, then four zoned editions, then five with eight on Sundays, before cutting back to three on weekdays. The staff felt ever more as though they were riding a pendulum, swinging back and forth between trying to offer the most localized coverage before reversing course and instead running broad pieces that attempted to capture the zeitgeist of the region.

Through it all, circulation kept dropping and the advertising dollars did not flow in sufficient numbers from all the many shopping malls that dotted that maddening circulation map. Although the population of Philadelphia's Center City was growing, the future was not in the city but, as it was for big-



city papers across the country, in the towns and villages that surrounded it. Two-thirds of the *Inquirer's* readers now lived in those suburbs, which also generated two-thirds of its ads.

Forty percent of the newsroom budget was spent covering the suburbs — twice as much as was spent covering the city and far more than the 5 percent that went to the national, Washington, and foreign reports. The pressure to offer its many scattered readers local news was not a decision made exclusively at the *Inquirer*. Knight Ridder was a great believer in local news, so much so that when Maxwell King, the paper's editor from 1990 to 1998, visited corporate headquarters he would be subjected to a review of his paper by Knight Ridder executives who wanted to know why he wasn't running more local stories on the *Inquirer's* front page. The executives explained that the readers the chain interviewed in its many focus groups said it was local news that they wanted.

This was true, but only up to a point. The *Inquirer* itself did a good deal of market research and what people who sat in on those meetings learned was that readers wanted not just local news; they wanted sports, fashion, dining guides, TV listings, and even news from faraway places. They wanted *everything*. Yet the mantra from Knight Ridder, heard by editors across the chain, was that if local was paramount it therefore stood to reason that other things were less important and certainly not worthy of the front page. The either/or framing sprang from an unintentionally patronizing view of suburban life. This view held that those who once lived in the city abandoned what interest they had in things that did not bear directly on their lives the moment they relocated to a split-level home with a two-car garage. It therefore stood to reason not only that foreign, national, and Washington stories were of lesser value, but that if the *Inquirer* was to have a local zoned edition in, say, Montgomery County, it was going to carry a Montgomery County story on the front page, no matter how mundane. It was the dateline that mattered because that's what readers said they wanted, or at least what those doing the asking wanted to believe they had heard.

Covering Montgomery County in a way that might generate all that local news meant boots on the ground — reporters who knew the area. This highlighted a conflict: Knight Ridder was determined to keep profit margins above the industry average. But the chain did not present editors like Max King with long-range plans on how to achieve and sustain those lofty margins, other than vague talk about community service and quality journalism. There was nothing concrete — King uses the word “robust” — that would facilitate the budgeting and planning to develop and keep in place a suburban strategy. Years later, Max King would recall his tenure and his trips

to headquarters, which were then in Miami. “It felt to me like a ceaseless pressure to help diminish costs and raise the profit margins,” he said. He was told that this had to be done “to satisfy the needs of the shareholders.” This assumed that the shareholders could, at some point, be satisfied. Knight Ridder looked at the numbers every month. And if the numbers fell short, Knight Ridder had one solution: cut. But that presented a problem: from a revenue-savings perspective, eliminating a foreign or national bureau was inconsequential. There was one place to cut where serious money could be saved and that was the suburbs. But the suburbs were the greatest potential source of revenue.

In 1999, the paper launched what at the time seemed a bold approach, worthy of the *Inquirer*: “the paper within a paper” — a daily section aimed exclusively at readers in Chester County. Eighteen reporters were assigned to the Chester County edition, and such was the excitement about the new approach that seasoned people asked to be part of the experiment. If the Chester County edition could succeed, the thinking went, the same approach could be applied elsewhere and the *Inquirer* could emerge as the definitive voice of the region. The “paper within a paper,” however, lasted only until 2001; it was dropped after the expected ad revenue did not materialize. In the view of the editors who worked on it, the business side gave up on the experiment far too quickly. Robert Rosenthal, who was by then the editor — and who tended to embrace story ideas with an infectious passion — wrote a memo announcing the section's demise but assuring the newsroom that the decision would not erode the paper. With that he launched yet another reinvention, a review of all the paper's many beats — his task force would eventually come up with 208 — so that a leaner *Inquirer* could begin producing stories “that transcend geography.” Rosenthal still believed the *Inquirer* could do big and important journalism, in the suburbs and elsewhere. Knight Ridder, however, made it clear to him that his ambitions for the paper were perhaps overdrawn.

“Well, you know, you created a Cadillac,” one corporate executive told him. “And we wanted a Chevy.” Rosenthal was fired nine months later.

The paper then embarked on yet another iteration of the suburban coverage, under Rosenthal's successor, Walker Lundy. Lundy, who came from the *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, the Knight Ridder paper in the Twin Cities, was granted approval to hire more than forty reporters, whom he dispatched to the suburbs along with twenty-three city-side reporters. He added two new zones to the existing three, and even people who had worked on devising the defunct Chester County edition allowed themselves to believe that, at long last, the *Inquirer* had a plan for

the suburbs. That was in 2002. Lundy quit a year later. Amanda Bennett inherited his plan, but no assurance that she would be able to keep all those people he had hired. For their part, the reporters in those suburban bureaus were not at all sure what their editors wanted them to be doing.

By the end of Satullo's September retreat, people were offering practical suggestions such as how to better incorporate the paper's Web site with its print edition, as well as recommendations that decision-making be less hierarchical. More important, the group was able to agree on what this new *In-*

and restrained. The current carpeted newsroom had in 1997 replaced the old and storied newsroom where mice ran free and where the office intrigue unfolded in many corners and nooks. The floor was then linoleum, by decree; James Naughton, executive editor in those days, had banned carpeting in the belief that it would deaden the noise and with it the creative spirit of the place.

Such was life at the *Inquirer* at a time known in the newsroom as "The Golden Age." The Golden Age began some time after 1972, when Gene Roberts was appointed editor, and is generally considered to have ended after 1990, when he retired.

## Every editor in that room understood what it meant for a newspaper to have a voice.

*quirer* would have to be. The paper would have to accept that there were things it could no longer afford to do. Yet for the *Inquirer* to remain the *Inquirer*, it would have to retain what Satullo called the paper's "core values": that it did investigations, served as watchdog, set the region's agenda — all the while maintaining its commitment to accuracy, ethics, and fairness.

All of this sounded good, in the way that mission statements at the end of such gatherings often do. But there was one other point that the editors believed essential: that the paper have "a voice." Not that the paper spoke in its news columns as one, but rather that it told stories in a way that compelled its readers to read on. Voice, of course, is a wonderful quality to possess but difficult to achieve in that it cannot be acquired by asking people what they want to read. Every editor in that room that day understood what it meant to have a voice, and understood that voice gives a newspaper the personality with which it can maintain a relationship with its readers.

Chris Satullo drove home that night feeling far better about the future of his newspaper than he had in days. "The people in that room were all pretty much committed to staying," he said. "I feel as if I'm not a fool to stay. There's no way what we're going through is good or pleasant or intrinsically good for a newspaper. But there's a chance if we can retain the spirit of that meeting we can redeem this moment."

With that he set about conducting similar meetings throughout the newsroom. But when only five people came to the first meeting, he understood "that the staff is still in purgatory."

### 3. Curse of the Golden Age

The *Inquirer's* two-story newsroom is so long and its ceilings so high that conversation feels muted

That occasion was marked by a very long and expensive party in a downtown hotel at which it was almost possible to forget that although Roberts was only fifty-eight years old he was carrying himself with the weary bearing of an older man.

Roberts had come to the *Inquirer* from *The New York Times*, where he'd been national editor. On his first day of work he entered the *Inquirer* building through a revolving door, only to pass an editor on his way out. The man paused only long enough to tell Roberts, "You're making the dumbest mistake of your life."

The *Inquirer* was, mercifully, no longer owned by Walter Annenberg, who had sold it to John S. Knight three years earlier. Knight had acquired a newspaper famous for very little other than the relentless way it covered the police blotter — a reporter in every precinct house — and the rare distinction of seeing its best-known reporter, Harry Karafin, sent to prison for extorting thousands of dollars from the subjects of his investigations in return for not writing about them.

Knight had spent a lot of money transforming newspapers in Akron, Miami, Chicago, and Detroit and was now prepared to do the same in Philadelphia. Before Roberts, he dispatched John McMullan, who had been executive editor of *The Miami Herald*, to edit the paper, and it was generally understood by the new reporters he hired that McMullan's role was to rid the *Inquirer* of its worst offenders and offenses. He stayed for two years, all the while preparing the newspaper for his successor.

Gene Roberts might well have stayed at the *Times* had Knight not dangled before him a paper so sorely in need of an overhaul. "I thought it would be an interesting thing to do with your life," he said, "to see if you could build a good newspaper."

The *Inquirer* was then running a distant second

in circulation and reputation to the *The Philadelphia Bulletin*, the dominant afternoon paper whose slogan — “In Philadelphia, nearly everybody reads the *Bulletin*” — was the theme of a series of cartoon ads in *The New Yorker*. Roberts understood that he was in no position to challenge the *Bulletin* as Philadelphia’s paper of record. But he could wage an altogether different sort of newspaper war, transforming his paper into the puckish upstart that, free from the constraints of having to cover everything, could pick its spots. Roberts had freedom, money, and time — he believed it would take years to reinvent the *Inquirer*.

He began to hire and, having briefly flirted with taking a desk in the middle of the newsroom — the better to get a feel of the place — also began looking for the paper’s untapped talent. Roberts understood that it was all well and good to talk about changing the culture of the newsroom — “you had to prove that excellence was possible on the paper,” he said — but quite another to impose those changes on people who had grown accustomed to the unfortunate ways of the past. The copy desk was a case in point: Roberts reasoned that adding a new editor or two would be counterproductive in that, human nature being what it is, those new editors would adapt to the desk’s existing culture. So he broke the desk apart, forming two smaller copy desks and on them installing his new people. They, in turn, were given the better stories to edit — the breaking stories and the trend pieces he wanted to see in the paper. As more editors came to the paper, they were assigned to the newly configured copy desks, where they were imbued with the culture of his *Inquirer*. “We developed a philosophy,” Roberts said, “that we’d zig when the others zagged.”

That is a refrain heard so often from veterans of the Golden Age that it has become a newsroom cliché — a pity, because the words once carried great power and meaning. The men and women who worked for Roberts talk, wistfully, of the possibilities that awaited them each day when they came to work. They were not guided, they say, by a journalistic sense of “should.” Their responsibility was not to be comprehensive but to be different, to be bold and, they admit without hesitation, to please the boss.

That did not happen easily. Roberts was both demanding and inscrutable. He said little — and at times, such as during job interviews, nothing at all. Still, he was very much the editor whom reporters wanted to please — “mostly we decided he was smarter than the rest of us,” said Steve Seplow, who came to the paper shortly after Knight bought it. That, however, is only part of it. Roberts understood what reporters needed to make them happy. He recognized that their sometimes-maddening combination of arrogance and insecurity could be

harnessed and channeled. He chose not to edit by intimidation — the staff appreciated his refusal to run the *Inquirer* by fear as his old boss, A.M. Rosenthal, ran the *Times* — but by manipulation. He would dispatch reporters to the suburbs, say, not by fiat but by convincing them that the future of American journalism was, in fact, in the suburbs and that that future was very much in their hands.

By the late 1970s, the *Bulletin* had become yet another in a dying breed of afternoon dailies. It was losing readers and money, just as the *Inquirer* was beginning to post annual profits of \$10 million and seeing its circulation climb. Roberts saw in this an opportunity to transform his paper further still. The death of the *Bulletin* would rob Philadelphia of its authoritative voice. Roberts intended to fill the void. And so he created the “Alpha Plan.”

The Alpha Plan was a year in the making and displayed both Roberts’s vision and his savvy. The death of the *Bulletin*, he reasoned, offered his paper’s corporate owners their one chance to prove to Philadelphia that they were serious about producing a paper of the highest quality. The chain was then still run by the spiritual heirs of John Knight, who had retired in 1976. Still, Roberts took no chances. He insisted that the wording of the plan be filled with military jargon, the better to please Alvah Chapman, Knight Ridder’s chairman and a graduate of The Citadel. The *Bulletin* folded on January 29, 1982, and that day Roberts, who almost never held staff meetings, stood in the middle of the newsroom and announced that the *Inquirer* would immediately hire seventeen reporters from the *Bulletin* and would double its number of foreign and national bureaus. He did not stop there: in the months to come he hired eighty-five people and continued expanding the paper’s suburban coverage. By 1984, *Time* magazine selected the *Inquirer* as one of the nation’s top ten newspapers — and on some days, *Time* argued, the best.

By the mid-1980s, the *Inquirer*’s profits had soared to over \$100 million a year. The paper had so much money and freedom in deciding how to spend it that when reporters took leaves others were hired to take their places. For years Roberts came back from Miami with whatever he wanted. But in 1986 that began to change with the appointment of Tony Ridder, who had been publisher of the *San Jose Mercury News*, as head of the chain’s newspaper division.

Since the 1974 merger of the Knight and Ridder chains, John Knight and his lieutenants had dominated the corporation. But Knight’s son and heir apparent had died in World War II and his grandson, John S. Knight III, an assistant to the managing editor of *The Daily News*, was stabbed to death in 1975. While Knight was a chain run by newspapermen with journalistic aspirations, the Ridders owned many smaller newspapers of marginal dis-

tion. The Ridders were regarded as prudent, perhaps overly so. The family, for example, owned the *Journal of Commerce*, whose circulation at the end of World War II matched that of *The Wall Street Journal*. In 1951, however, the Ridders, looking to cut costs, decided to drop *The Journal of Commerce's* stock listings and to focus the news columns on stories of narrow interest — a move so short-sighted that, years later, the *New York Times's* Floyd Norris would include it in his list of the century's dozen worst business decisions. Fifty years later, the *Journal of Commerce's* circulation stood at 17,000 — as compared to the *Journal's* 1.75 million.

## The investors were now like those on the editorial staff of the *Inquirer* still pining for the Golden Age — longing for the days when profit margins exceeded 20 percent.

By the mid-1980s, it was no secret that Roberts, a darling in John Knight's chain, had fallen out of favor with those who now ran the chain. Though Tony Ridder never criticized Roberts publicly, the view from Miami was made clear, years later, by Knight Ridder's vice president and corporate spokesman, Polk Laffoon IV. "Our definition of what is good journalism here has evolved from the time Gene Roberts was editing *The Philadelphia Inquirer*" in the 1970s and '80s, he told Howard Kurtz of *The Washington Post* in 2001. "We put a lot of emphasis on local news and useful or service-oriented features and news that readers tell us over and over that they want . . . health and nutrition, personal finance, personal technology."

That would suggest that Roberts was not interested in such matters; to the contrary — he was, for just one example, a stickler about television listings. Still, by 1990, the legacy of the Alpha Plan was crippling the paper in ways that could not have been envisioned in 1982. Producing a newspaper of record requires a commitment from those holding the purse strings to the quality of the content. To be perceived as trying to do it on the cheap, to second-guess the vision and the approach, risks jeopardizing the fragile nature of the enterprise.

By 1989, when Ridder became president of the chain, the staff had grown accustomed to seeing Roberts trudge into the newsroom after his monthly budget meetings in Miami. After one especially draining trip, an editor spotted Roberts and asked, "Who won, the Christians or the lions?"

"The Christians," Roberts replied, in his low and languid drawl. "But the lions only have to win once."

By 1990, he had had enough. "God knows I

tried," he now says. "But in the end I wasn't going to change anything. And there were forces bigger than me that were propelling the company."

On November 18 last year, the *Inquirer* was preparing to bid farewell to seventy-five people, fifty-five of whom were veterans of the Golden Age. Six had even worked for Walter Annenberg. They were people who had been young together, who, before spouses and children and the inevitable desire to make it home before bedtime, had played cards and gone drinking together and come to see themselves as part of something grand, though ever more distant. It was still possible to find pockets of

the Golden Age at the *Inquirer*, such as the investigative team, which was housed in a room in the farthest reaches of the newsroom with a door that the staff could close to keep the darkening mood from seeping in.

It was getting close to 5 o'clock and Amanda Bennett was in her office, preparing to make a formal farewell. She seemed uneasy. She tucked herself in the corner of a long, blue couch and admitted that she had taken the job knowing that a day just like this one could come. "It would have been naïve of me to think it was impossible."

But would the cutting stop?

"I hope so," she said. "I don't know."

She excused herself, the better to prepare for the task to come. She emerged a few minutes later and made her way to the distant corner of the newsroom where the business staff had gathered to bid farewell to Patricia Horn, a reporter who was leaving after only seven years. Bennett approached the gathering but stopped before making her presence felt. She stepped away only to circle back, as if she was not sure where to stand.

Meanwhile, people began moving slowly to the front of the room, where tables were being set up for a buffet dinner. As they drew closer, they began whispering to one another: *Gene Foreman is here*. Foreman had been Roberts's managing editor, and people crowded around him, shook his hand and hugged him.

Bennett stepped forward to speak. She held her arms across her chest. "This is such a sad day," she said. She spoke of all the "great journalism from all of you who are leaving," of all the extra phone calls and late nights. "We wish you joy and luck in your



new lives." Then she stepped aside to let the publisher, Joe Natoli, speak.

The staff did not blame Natoli for the buyouts. Many, in fact, spoke with admiration of the way he had come down to the newsroom after they were announced, stopping at people's desks to chat and offer what answers and reassurances he could. He came quickly to the point. "I wanted to spend time talking about growth," he said. "But events have overtaken us and we are where we are today." The great room was quiet. "We're in a time of uncertainty unlike any other than I have ever faced in my thirty years in the newspaper business."

And then Natoli said what those who were staying later admitted they very much wanted to hear: "I'm convinced the world needs what we do."

Now it was Bob Martin's turn. He had been at the *Inquirer* for nineteen years and, it turned out, was something of an amateur songwriter. Martin opened a manila envelope and took out a thick sheaf of pages, enough for everyone. On it were the lyrics to a song in which Martin had managed to condense the history of the *Inquirer*. The name of the song, and the refrain the staff sang together, was "We Didn't Miss the Deadline."

Martin stepped to the microphone and turned on his boom box. People smiled at the words and everyone was singing.

#### 4. The Lions' Den

Knight Ridder's executives had been scheduled to appear at the annual UBS Global Media Conference, but with the company in play the presentation was canceled. Still, the fate of the chain was very much on the minds of the analysts who gathered on the morning of December 7 in a ballroom at the Grand Hyatt Hotel in midtown Manhattan.

For thirty-three years the nation's most important newspaper executives had come before the analysts, whose standing had grown dramatically since the days when John S. Knight could say with impunity that no one was going to tell him how to run his company. When he took his company public, however, Knight issued only a single class of stock, unlike the Sulzberger and Graham families who maintained for themselves a separate class of stock and with it voting power over their companies. Knight's banker, Goldman Sachs, had recommended that a single class would be more attractive to investors.

From the often-limited perspective of journalists — who assumed that mere profitability would suffice — the relationship between the analysts and the media companies had become an unseemly one in that the power now resided with men and women who appeared not at all interested in the quality of the content but instead looked at the quarterly numbers as evidence of those companies' worth. Every quarterly statement, in turn, was an

occasion for a conference call between the heads of those companies and the analysts, who asked many questions about earnings, revenue streams, and cost-containment.

For instance, in the October conference call that took place a few weeks after the *Inquirer* announced its job cuts, Tony Ridder and his chief deputies made clear that they understood that while the chain's small-market papers were showing strong growth in advertising revenue, Philadelphia, in particular, was a problem. Advertising was slipping for movies, airlines, and telecommunications. The fourth quarter did not look promising. Still, steps had been taken to boost ad revenue and to contain costs, especially in San Jose, where the *Mercury News* was losing fifty people, and in Philadelphia. This prompted Frederick Searby of JPMorgan to pose a more cosmic question:

"Do you think there's a rethink in terms of the newspaper model that will continue and how much you really can support at this point from an editorial perspective?"

Tony Ridder offered a narrowly reasoned response. "Well, I think that after we have the staff reductions, I think we will still be generously staffed," he said. "So I think we were overstaffed in those two places and I think this is just bringing them back into line."

Until the afternoon of November 1, it was possible to stand in the newsroom of the *Inquirer* and believe that Tony Ridder was the worst person in the world — but then, that was before people heard of Bruce Sherman. Ridder, the refrain went, cared not a lick about the quality of the papers his chain published, and was so lacking in imagination and the capacity to look into the future that his one solution to all financial difficulties was to cut the payroll.

Ridder had gotten off to a bad start. In the spring of 1987, not long after he became head of Knight Ridder's newspaper division, he came to visit the *Inquirer*. The paper had just won three Pulitzers. Ridder told the assembled editors and managers that while he wanted to congratulate them on the prizes, he wanted to speak with them about "something more important." "Next year," he said, "I would like you to win a Pulitzer for cost cutting."

He had preached this ethic ever since, adhering to a business strategy that focused on the moment. He sold off such ventures as Knight Ridder Financial, which accounted for 20 percent of the chain's revenue but only 5 percent of its profits, and the Information Design Laboratory, where the chain had conducted some of the earliest work on electronic publishing. He became known in his newsrooms as "Darth Ridder." All the while he clung to his arguments that even though his newspapers were jettisoning reporters and editors, they were still staffed above the industry standard — one reporter for

every thousand subscribers — and that his newsroom spending had, in fact, gone up. He was said to be deeply hurt when in 2001 his friend, Jay Harris, resigned as publisher in San Jose to protest the cuts Ridder was demanding — just as Harris's counterpart at *The Miami Herald*, David Lawrence, had done three years earlier.

Tony Ridder was now sixty-five years old and enjoyed sailing, outback skiing, and driving expensive sports cars. He also possessed a knack for the leaden touch with the public gesture: at the end of 2005, for instance, his company's compensation board voted to increase his annual bonus

to forget that Walter Annenberg had been just such an owner and had driven the paper well past the point of ridicule.

Bruce Sherman had gone to San Jose last July, at Knight Ridder's invitation. Sherman, as it happened, liked to visit the headquarters of the companies in which he had invested. He believed it important to get a feel for the men and women who ran the companies, to broaden the knowledge he systematically acquired in his exhaustive review of the numbers. Sherman was fifty-seven and was one of the nation's most successful money managers. In the story of Knight Ridder's fall, he emerged as a

## Tony Ridder had become a metaphor for American newspapers — the man who in trying to please everyone, pleased no one.

from 85 percent to 95 percent of salary. Still, it was hard not to feel a bit sorry for Ridder, who, like so many newspaper executives, was caught in a quandary that was not, strictly speaking, of his own making. Whatever desires and hopes he had for maintaining the high standards of his newspapers were eclipsed by powers greater than his own: the analysts, the shareholders, the money managers like Bruce Sherman. Jack Knight had taken his company public because he wanted the shareholders to invest in his newspapers. Those investors, in turn, were now like those on the staff of the *Inquirer* still pining for the Golden Age — longing for the days when profit margins exceeded 20 percent, and the foresight they had displayed in identifying newspapers as undervalued stocks had proven correct. And like the journalistic veterans of the Golden Age, the shareholders were disappointed with the man they now held responsible for their diminished fortunes.

But where Ridder's fall assumed a tragic quality was, ironically, in his expressed desire to produce newspapers of quality. Granted, papers like the *Inquirer* were not what they once were. Yet even among the increasingly embittered staff of the *Inquirer*, there was the understanding that good work could still be done. Now, with the company up for sale, people spoke of the possibility of things getting worse, which for many meant Gannett. In journalistic circles Gannett represented a newspaper world of vastly diminished ambitions, of short, shallow stories and the overuse of the word "us."

As more and more names of potential bidders emerged, people at the *Inquirer* began talking, almost prayerfully, of the paper's being rescued by private investors, wealthy enough — the Newhouses, say — to not be Wall Street's slave. It was easy

marvelous counterpart to the patrician Ridder: the accountant from Queens — the "streets" of Queens — who had displayed an early gift at assessing stocks. He told the story of how, after reading the annual report, he calculated that the time was right to sell the ten shares of Polaroid stock that his engineer father had bought at \$20 a share for his Bar Mitzvah; Sherman sold at \$180. Sherman's firm, PCM, now had \$4.3 billion of the \$30 billion it managed in newspaper stocks and had strong positions in, among others, Gannett, Media General, McClatchy, Journal Register, and the New York Times Company.

Whatever questions Sherman put to Ridder, the answers did not please him. He made his disappointment clear in the November letter demanding the sale. Granted, he wrote, the board had taken steps to boost the stock's value — "so far as they went." But Knight Ridder was still burdened by the loss of advertising, and "unexceptional operating margins." The company's "break-up value," he concluded, is "substantially in excess of the current share price."

Sherman was doing what he was paid to do, which was to make sure the companies in which he had placed his clients' money performed. It was not his brief to ensure that Knight Ridder's newspapers were places of great journalistic accomplishment. By taking Bruce Sherman's money, Tony Ridder — and every other media company in which Sherman held stock — had assumed a subservient role in a culture whose values they did not necessarily share.

Tony Ridder had become a metaphor for American newspapers — the man who in trying to please everyone, pleased no one. And for his all trouble he now stood very close to losing his company.

Knight Ridder had set a December 9 deadline for the first round of bids for the company. In the days after Sherman's announcement, analysts were setting the odds at no better than fifty-fifty that someone would want to buy Knight Ridder — given the problems that had led to shareholder revolt. Yet a month later, by the morning of the UBS conference, the names of several prospective suitors had begun to surface, among them two private equity firms, the Blackstone Group and Kohlberg Kravis Roberts & Co. Among the analysts at the conference was Eugene H. Gardner Jr. who lived and worked in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, a town on the very edge of the *Inquirer's* circulation map. He was not a subscriber. He read *The Wall Street Journal* as well as *The New York Times* online. He also subscribed to the two Lancaster dailies. He saw no need to add a "regional" paper to the mix. He lived too far from Philadelphia to be interested in, say, the listings and restaurant reviews the *Inquirer* carried. There was very little that the *Inquirer*, as it had been conceived in its series of reinventions, could offer him.

Gardner had sympathy for Joe Natoli and Amanda Bennett, and he also had sympathy for Tony Ridder. He was careful to avoid criticizing him, even though he believed that "you cannot cut and cut your way to quality."

As he spoke, Gardner sounded more and more like a man politely declining a dinner invitation. "I can't name a single *Inquirer* journalist for you right now," he said. "That's too bad."

But could the *Inquirer* do anything to make itself appealing to him?

"I want a regional newspaper to appear on my doorstep . . ." he began, thinking out loud. "What would it contain?"

He paused. He took a minute before replying.

"Opinions," he said at last. "And not just regarding what's happening in the city." He wanted writers who compelled him to read. If the *Inquirer* was going to lure him, Gardner went on to explain, it would have to acquire what it now lacked: a voice.

The UBS conference offered a snapshot, of sorts, of the state of the industry. Dennis FitzSimons, the embattled chairman of Tribune Company, assured the analysts that the company was cutting to keep expenses flat: nine hundred jobs had been eliminated in the past year, mostly on the publishing side. Dow Jones followed, but with its profit margins having slipped into the single digits, many of the analysts left the room. Then came Gannett. The analysts flooded back in, as if the exotic dancer had just arrived at a bachelor party. One of them, fairly bursting, asked Craig Dubow, the company's chairman, whether it might be possible for Gannett to boost its margin from its stellar 25 percent to a stratospheric 30 percent. Dubow made no commitments.

With that another analyst asked whether Gannett

might make a bid for Knight Ridder. Dubow replied that Gannett would, as always, take a "hard look" at all potential acquisitions.

## 5. Indian Summer

After years of 9 o'clock, 10 o'clock, and lunchtime budget meetings, after months of planning the reorganization of a staff with seventy-five fewer people, after a fall of endless speculation and dispatches on the latest turns in the Knight Ridder sale, Amanda Bennett was ready, as she put it, to "do journalism." She could barely contain her excitement.

In December the various committees had submitted their reports on the *Inquirer's* reinvention, and Bennett had celebrated their work with a champagne toast. Changes began almost immediately. Editors were reassigned. The investigative staff moved from the seclusion of its corner office to a cluster in the middle of the newsroom. And now, in mid-January, Bennett was bringing the newsroom, desk by desk, into the page-one meeting room to hear the long and detailed PowerPoint presentation that Anne Gordon, the managing editor, had prepared on the future of the paper.

It was a moment unlike any other at the *Inquirer*. The potential sale of the chain had, at once, left the newsroom in limbo and effectively removed Knight Ridder from the everyday business of the paper. Bennett had been freed to proceed without corporate interference. She had solicited the collective wisdom and the sensibility of her staff and had discovered, much to her delight, a view of the *Inquirer's* future remarkably similar to her own. It was, in fact, a vision that she had brought with her from Lexington to Philadelphia three years earlier and that now, arguably in the darkest and most unsettled time that anyone could recall, she at last had her chance to try to make happen.

The business desk's turn came in the second week of presentations. The staff arranged themselves around the long conference table and, when that filled up, the chairs around the edge of the room. The lights went dim and on the screen appeared a headline "Newsroom 2006."

For the next forty-five minutes, Bennett and Gordon outlined a plan that called for, among other changes, cutting the number of zones from five to three, and placing an ever-greater emphasis on disseminating the news online. Those and many smaller changes they detailed were in service of a larger goal: the *Inquirer* could not and would not continue trying to be Philadelphia's paper of record. That, in turn, meant that the shrunken staff was now free from the burden of covering everything, and given that freedom, the paper would begin to be filled with the boldly conceived and written pieces that had once been its hallmark. The readers, too, had

spoken. The *Inquirer* had conducted yet another round of focus groups in the fall, and the report back confirmed what people had been hearing for as long as they'd been asking: readers turned to the *Inquirer* to read national and foreign stories almost as much as they wanted local news.

The new *Inquirer*, Bennett and Gordon explained, would work to satisfy those readers, though it could not do so in the ways of the past. For one thing, 750,000 people now read the *Inquirer* either in print or online. There was little crossover between the two markets, which meant that it was necessary to satisfy both. The paper itself would no longer be merely reactive to events, filled with news that was, for practical purposes, stale by the time it appeared in the *Inquirer*. Bennett and Gordon wanted the paper to break news — in print and online. The *Inquirer's* Web site, Philly.com, would become the destination for news breaking throughout the day. The site, which as Gordon put it was now filled with "cul-de-sacs," was being redesigned. Each desk would be given control of its own online content.

As for the newspaper, Bennett and Gordon wanted stories that anticipated events, pieces ready to run when things broke. They wanted intelligently imagined angles. The day's front page offered a case in point: rather than cover the president's speech defending his administration's secret domestic spying, the *Inquirer* instead fronted a story about the competing uses of the Fourth Amendment by the program's supporters and critics.

"We want you to select for ambition," Bennett said. "We want you to select for quality."

The operative verb, of course, was "select." The implication was that, in the absence of being aggressively selective, it was easy to slip into making the default choice of reporting what, in Bennett's view, everyone already knew. In fact, she had felt this way about the paper even before she arrived. "I found the paper very dull," she said. "We were still doing a lot of institutional coverage. We were still clinging to the newspaper of record, and the newspaper of record thing was a noose." There was, she went on, "a lower-than-I-would-have-liked level of storytelling."

She believed that the *Inquirer* was "not tremendously engaged" in the region; it was missing too many stories it should have seized upon, such as strong coverage of the area's extensive medical and pharmaceutical industries. The *Inquirer*, she explained, "was still a very good paper," but one that went about its work guided by "deep and profound habits. We run ourselves ragged to cover everything."

But all this raised the question of what she no longer wanted her paper to cover. It was a question very much on the minds of her staff, as had become clear when Bennett and Gordon made their presentation to the metro desk. Tom Ferrick, a colum-

nist who had been at the paper for thirty years — and who largely agreed with their vision — asked if Bennett and Gordon weren't, in fact, outlining a plan that would mean more work for fewer people.

What precisely, he asked, would the staff no longer cover? Was it to be the case that the young city hall reporter sitting next to him would be expected to file repeatedly to Philly.com several times a day, all the while leaving him ever less time to report and write the more ambitious pieces that the new *Inquirer* was to carry?

Gordon replied that "tough choices" would have to be made. Ferrick was not satisfied. He and Gordon soon ended up in a heated exchange. Ferrick returned to his desk and wrote a memo to Bennett and Gordon, apologizing for his outburst but then pressing for the explanation he was not alone in wanting. "If we try to do everything, we won't do anything particularly well," he wrote. "The message I got was: we are going to do it all. In fact, we are going to expand into online in a major way. The problem with this is that this doesn't give the necessary guidance to reporters. By telling them to do it all, you cede the decision on triage to the people in the field. (If the generals won't make the decision, the corporals will.)"

Which, ironically, is precisely what Bennett wanted. She wanted to believe that as she articulated a vision her staff would understand what she wanted and would, in turn, themselves make the very decisions that Ferrick was demanding of her.

She could, if she chose, edit by command. "If I say, 'run over there' they'll run," she said. "But you're not going to get what you want. I could make a Delphic pronouncement and see it happen and not want it to happen. When you're trying to make a really fundamental change you've got to make sure that people understand what that change is. That people have the tools and have the support of their colleagues. And that they want to make that change." She began sending Friday memos to the staff on what had worked that week, and, without saying it in so many words, what had pleased her.

She could already see the change coming, in spots. She had been happy, for example, to read an e-mail exchange in which a reporter challenged a metro editor who was asking for a crime story. The reporter argued that that was precisely the kind of story the paper was not going to cover anymore. Some editors, Bennett said, had grasped the concept more quickly than others. Among them was Bob Rose, the business editor.

She had hired Rose from her old paper, *The Wall Street Journal*, whose culture was very much one of leaving some stories untold — or briefed — in return for pursuing the larger piece that others had not even thought of. As it happened, that morning,



Rose was presented with a story that necessitated his choosing between the paper's traditional ways and Bennett's vision of the future. Ford had announced that it was shutting fourteen plants and laying off 30,000 people, a big story. Tradition would have called for pulling a reporter off one piece — perhaps a time-consuming enterprise piece — and, in the absence of an auto writer on the staff, asking him to cobble together something for the next day's paper. Rose considered doing just that, and then changed his mind. Without a large piece

newspaper that had so inflamed the Muslim world, and which so many of the big papers chose not to print. The newspaper that Bennett had in mind had existed once before: it was the *Inquirer* before the Alpha Plan, before the death of the *Bulletin*, before the days when it could reasonably challenge the *Times* and *Post*. The *Inquirer* of the mid-1970s was a renegade. It ignored things. Its stories ran long. It indulged its reporters; it made so many of them so happy that they pushed themselves to do good work and did not want to leave.

**'I'm going to do journalism here,' Bennett said. 'I'm going to try to change the paper into something alive and vibrant and thoughtful.'**

already conceived and reported about, say, the decline of the American auto industry, without a writer in Detroit or someone in-house with real knowledge of the industry, and without any Ford plants in the area, he decided to leave it to the wires. Instead, he concentrated on two local stories — a scoop on Donald Trump's plan to build a forty-five-story luxury condominium on the Delaware waterfront, and the Food and Drug Administration's decision to allow the sale of prescription diet pills over the counter, one of which was manufactured in Philadelphia. Both stories ran on page one.

Still, it had been one thing for Gene Roberts to edit in his often-inscrutable way, leaving his subordinates to decipher his meaning. Roberts had hired 400 people who had come to his *Inquirer* because he had detected in them an understanding of what he wanted. Bennett had inherited a staff hired by Roberts and his successors. Roberts himself had some sympathy for her predicament. "Say you come up with a plan," he said. "My experience is that it's going to take you five years to implement it. You can't implement it without hiring flexibility. After all, your staff has given you your existing newspaper."

Bennett could not hire, and she had set in motion a process that could only be achieved with time. Time, however, given Knight Ridder's imminent sale, was an unknown quantity.

It was not the Golden Age that Amanda Bennett wanted to reclaim — she had neither the money, the large staff, nor, it was now clear, the inclination. But the plan she had envisioned, which even her critics in the newsroom thought a good one, could bring to the *Inquirer* not another reinvention but something far more satisfying: a restoration.

Bennett's *Inquirer* soon displayed a willingness to, as it were, zig when others zagged, when in February it published the cartoons from a Danish

Now there were people, especially the newer reporters, who had come to the *Inquirer* from other places, who did not want to believe that they had made a mistake in coming to Philadelphia. They were surrounded by older people who had decided not to leave, and who had known what it was like to work at a great newspaper and wanted to experience that particular joy again. Chris Satullo felt it was important that Bennett and Gordon appreciate just how corrosive the past fifteen years had been to the staff of the *Inquirer* and to be aware, as he put it, of the "scars people carry on their backs."

Meanwhile, in San Jose, Knight Ridder was hosting its suitors. Gannett had tendered a preliminary bid along with McClatchy, Providence Equity Partners, Texas Pacific Group, Madison Dearborn Partners, Spectrum Equity, Thomas H. Lee Partners, and Media News Group although it was still difficult to tell which firms might actually be secret partners.

The sale and the future were out of Amanda Bennett's hands, and that brought her a certain comfort. "There's nothing I can do about it," she said. She sat on the edge of the long blue couch in her office. Two parakeets chirped in a cage next to her desk. "I'm going to do journalism here. I'm going to try to change this paper into something alive and vibrant and thoughtful."

Anne Gordon appeared at her door. Gordon looked concerned, unnecessarily so. She had brought to Bennett what was, at the moment, the most welcome sort of problem: a question about a story. ■

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For forty years, Walter Pincus has mucked around in some of D.C.'s darkest corners — and yet he remains determined to reform Washington, piece by piece

## THE OPTIMIST

BY DAVID GLENN

In conversation, Walter Pincus has two basic modes: amiable, sharp-witted enthusiasm and avuncular, seen-it-all grumbling. His words are sometimes accompanied by a subtle, sotto voce laugh, which can express amusement or disgust, depending on which gear he is in at the moment.

Last November 16, Pincus was given two new reasons to grumble. Judge Rosemary M. Collyer of the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia threatened that day to hold him in contempt if he did not identify the anonymous sources he relied on when covering the 1999 investigation of Wen Ho Lee, the Los Alamos nuclear scientist who was suspected of passing computer codes to the Chinese. Lee is now suing the government, charging violations of the federal Privacy Act of 1974, and his lawyers have pressed Pincus and five other reporters to give up their sources.

The same day, a spotlight was thrown on an embarrassing he-said, he-said dispute between Pincus and his *Washington Post* colleague Bob Woodward. That morning's *Post* contained Woodward's belated confession that he had been told about Valerie Plame's CIA employment as early as June 2003.

Woodward said he had mentioned the tidbit to Pincus in the newsroom that same month. Pincus insists that he remembers no such conversation.

In a series of interviews over breakfast in December and January, Pincus griped about the number of hours he has recently had to spend huddled with lawyers strategizing about the threats hanging over his head: a \$500-a-day civil fine in the Lee case (which has been stayed pending his next appeal) and potential subpoenas for his original notes about Ambassador Joseph Wilson in the Valerie Plame saga. Each case, of course, involves several reporters, but Pincus alone suffers the headache of having been drawn into both affairs. And the stakes are not trivial: when the dust settles, the jurisprudential foundation of reporter-source confidentiality might be weaker than it has been in decades.

Pincus scoffs at the idea of turning over his Wilson notes, which, he says, could not possibly include anything relevant to the perjury and obstruction-of-justice charges facing I. Lewis Libby. And toward Wen Ho Lee's lawsuit, Pincus has not much sympathy — despite the fact that his original coverage of Lee was much less prosecutorial than that of *The*

*New York Times*. "If I were Wen Ho Lee, would I want to sue someone?" he says. "No. I mean, I think he was badly treated. But he did plead guilty to a felony. He did something that no one in the history of the Los Alamos lab had ever done before. And they still haven't found the tapes he transferred."

But during precisely the same conversations, alongside the avuncular growls, there are moments when Pincus's eyes light up and he launches into a soliloquy about some interesting new thing he has learned. He attended Georgetown Law School part-time beginning in 1995 and graduated in 2001, at the age of sixty-eight. While there, he says, he picked up new perspectives on the history and

Pincus is not at all shy about saying that he hopes his coverage will change the Pentagon's behavior. 'That's what papers are about.'

structure of the reporter-source privilege, and he has been pouring those insights into the briefs his lawyers have filed in the Lee case.

In these bright-eyed moments, it's easy to see the curiosity and ambition that have propelled Pincus through his long career. He joined the *Post* in 1966, and he has been at the paper for thirty-five of the last forty years, primarily covering intelligence and national security. Most recently, Pincus has sweated on the story of the Pentagon's expanded domestic-surveillance operations (not to be confused with the National Security Agency's more heavily covered spying operation), which he first exposed in a late November article. Between 1975 and 1987, he also held gigs as a consultant and producer for network news operations, winning an Emmy in 1981 for the CBS series *Defense of the United States*. More recently, he has had a contract to offer business advice to the Washington Post Corporation. "He had about eight jobs at once for a while there," says Ben Bradlee, the *Post*'s former executive editor. "At one point it was a little too rich for my blood. But I didn't really care, as long as I got mine. He works incredibly long hours."

Some of Pincus's detours and enthusiasms have led to frustration. His brief mid-1960s tenure as editor of the *Post*'s Sunday magazine was not a notable success. "Why, oh why, did I think that would be a profitable use of Pincus?" Bradlee says with a laugh. Pincus also spent two years in the 1970s on an aborted attempt to launch a national daily, the *Morning News*, then tried and failed to buy *The New Republic*.

But on the whole, his colleagues say, Pincus's diverse projects, and his desire to have his fingers in several pies at once, have served him well. The *New Yorker*'s Seymour Hersh, whose name is often mentioned in the same breath as Pincus's, says, "Walter's one of the good guys. We disagree about a million things, but he does excellent work." Doyle McManus, the Washington bureau chief of the *Los Angeles Times*, calls Pincus "the Cal Ripken of intelligence reporting — sustained excellence over an astonishingly long run."

The question the seventy-three-year-old Pincus might be asking himself at 3 a.m. is whether he, like Ripken, ought to have ended his streak in 1998, before the names Wen Ho Lee and Valerie Plame had made headlines. A less driven person might have retired around then; very few members of Pincus's generation remain in the newsroom. The clubby world of Washington journalism that Pincus knew as a young man has come to an end, and the Lee and Plame cases somehow seem to punctuate the change. Pincus himself plans on writing a book that will be part memoir, part exploration of "what the hell has happened to the news media." He says, however, that he has no urge to retire soon, and is eager to plug away at the Pentagon-surveillance story: "My view is, you do it in chunks. You just keep going back until it sinks in." Sinks in not only to the public consciousness, but also the Washington bunker. Pincus is not at all shy about saying that he hopes his coverage will change the Pentagon's behavior. "That's what papers are about," he insists. "That's why you own a paper, that's why you write for a paper."

Pincus published his first piece of journalism on his twenty-second birthday — an editorial related to the *New York Times*'s "Hundred Neediest Cases" campaign. In 1954 Pincus graduated from Yale, and on a friend's advice he landed a job as a copy boy at the *Times*, working with Hanson Baldwin and James Reston, among others. "Hanson Baldwin, at that time, was the military correspondent of *The New York Times*," Pincus says. "And everything he wrote had a huge impact. People read him to find out what the hell was going on. And that always impressed me." At the family dinner the night his editorial ran, Pincus recalls, "My father, who didn't want me to go into journalism, told me that they only published it to make me feel good, because it was my birthday."

Pincus's job at the *Times* ended in 1955 with his induction into the Army. He was stationed in Washington, serving his two-year stint in the counterintelligence corps. When he was discharged, he decided to try his hand at reporting, at least for a bit. During the evenings, he worked on the copy desk of the Washington edition of *The Wall Street Journal*, and during the day, he served as the D.C. correspondent for the *Goldsboro* (North Carolina)



*News-Argus*. This, he says, "was the greatest training in the world," because he was competing with the wire services, and had to master speed and detail. If he beat the AP by three hours on a story about farm legislation, that was a good day.

It was during this period, Pincus says, when he was scrambling to overcome his ignorance about tobacco subsidies, that he developed the habit of poring over obscure reports and transcripts from congressional committees. (In later years, according to a mutual friend, Bradlee used to introduce Pincus by saying, "This is Walter Pincus. He likes six-point type!") On one such fishing expedition, in 1959, he discovered a trove of records that suggested that members of Congress were abusing their travel privileges. "A congressman would travel with his wife," he says, "but the bill would have the wife's name crossed off. Or there would be a bar bill and they'd cross 'bar' off and they'd put 'food.'"

Compared to the territory Pincus would later cover — illegal lobbying, Iran-contra, alleged nuclear spying — that was a picayune scandal. But it turned out to be his big break. He showed the travel records to his friend Don Oberdorfer, who then covered Washington for *The Charlotte Observer*. The two men wrote a long investigative feature, but weren't sure where to place it. "So we went to Izzy Stone" — the muckraking icon I.F. Stone — "who sort of acted as a mentor to a bunch of us," says Pincus, "and he said why don't you try *Life*?" That sounded slightly outlandish, but it worked. *Life* bought the piece, Pincus says, "for more money than either one of us made in a year."

Nineteen fifty-nine turned out to be pivotal. That year Pincus realized that his interest in journalism was not simply a lark, that he would definitely not work for his father's electrical-supply business, and that he wanted to stay in Washington. Pincus's first marriage didn't survive those insights; his wife and young son moved back to New York. Newly divorced and feeling footloose, Pincus took a vacation that has haunted him ever since.

On the suggestion of his friend Charles Bartlett of the *Chattanooga Times*, Pincus signed up with a Massachusetts-based organization that was sending an anticommunist contingent to a huge communist-sponsored youth festival in Vienna. "It cost \$150, and it was ten days in Vienna and then four days on your own," he says. "So it seemed like a great deal." Pincus and the rest of the delegation — whose ring-leader was the twenty-five-year-old Gloria Steinem — passed out thousands of newspapers and pamphlets, most of them in a liberal-but-anti-Soviet vein. Pincus's primary memories of Vienna, however, are of meeting people over beer in the evenings. "It was sort of a college weekend, but with Russians," he says.

When he came home, Pincus learned — not too

surprisingly, in retrospect — that Steinem's outfit received most of its money from the CIA. Even after learning that fact, Pincus attended three more conferences on the group's behalf — and, indeed, mulled and rejected an offer to join the agency.

The episode has never quite been forgotten. In early 1967, *Ramparts* published a long report about the CIA's covert operations within student groups. The *Ramparts* article did not name Pincus, but he felt he should come clean about his earlier adventure. In a front-page article in the *Post* that February, Pincus wrote a detailed — although oddly dry and clinical — account of his involvement with the group. Thirty years later, Gary Webb would suggest that Pincus's CIA ties explained why the *Post* had dismissed Webb's sweeping *San Jose Mercury News* stories of drug-running by CIA affiliates in the 1980s. More recently, a few conservatives have insinuated that Pincus's CIA associations explain why he publicized Joseph Wilson's doubts about Iraq's nuclear-weapons programs.

Pincus doesn't deny that he has longstanding relationships with sources in the CIA. Most of those, he says, ultimately stem from his social network in Washington in the mid-1960s, not from the earlier encounters at youth conferences. But he says it's absurd to suggest that he has been a stooge for the agency. He has been sharply critical of the CIA's actions in Watergate, the Iran-contra scandal, and the run-up to the Iraq war. Even his 1975 critique in *The New York Times* of Philip Agee's exposé, *Inside the Company: CIA Diary* — a critique that Webb cited as further evidence of Pincus's complicity — argued that Agee was essentially correct about the extent of CIA political interference in Latin America and domestic surveillance at home. "There is a line that can be drawn between covert intelligence gathering and undeclared covert political warfare," he wrote. "The former is acceptable where needed; the latter is not."

Pincus's review of the Agee book describes some disturbing CIA behavior, but it also exudes a certain cool confidence that "presidential and congressional review" can rein in the agency. Pincus's entire career since 1960 — and especially his approach to the national-security beat — has reflected this duality. He works hard to unearth misdeeds, but his coverage also consistently implies that, somewhere in official Washington, there are wise old heads who can set things straight. Pincus's articles rarely contain the undertone of alarm and rage that one finds in, say, Seymour Hersh's.

That sensibility surely evolved in part from Pincus's two stints during the 1960s as an investigator for the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. There, after all, he was digging in dark corners with the clear expectation that his research would lead to policy reform. Pincus's connection with the Senate committee began in 1962, after its chairman, Senator J. William Fulbright, read a pair of articles that

Pincus had co-authored in *The Reporter*, a liberal bi-weekly that had become one of his major venues after the CIA episode. In one piece, Pincus and Douglass Cater exposed foreign governments' covert attempts to use U.S. media for public relations. The article detailed, among other things, the efforts of Rafael Trujillo, the U.S.-backed dictator of the Dominican Republic, to buy favorable news coverage on the Mutual radio network, and the Guatemalan regime's covert purchase of friendly coverage in, of all places, *The American Mercury*.

After seeing Pincus's work, Fulbright called and

Pincus would stay up all night photographing the documents with a special camera, and then his source would smuggle them back to his office.

offered him a temporary assignment investigating the activities of unregistered foreign agents. In 1962, Pincus traveled to the Dominican Republic and gathered evidence that Trujillo (who had been assassinated the previous spring) had used various dicey means as he tried to influence the Kennedy administration's sugar policies. Among other things, in early 1961 Trujillo had secretly paid the nationally syndicated gossip columnist Igor Cassini — whose fashion-designer brother, Oleg, made dresses for Jackie Kennedy — to push the White House to reinstate his country's sugar quotas.

Pincus nailed that story in part with the help of an anti-Trujillo politician who brought documents to him each evening. Pincus would stay up all night photographing the documents with a special camera, and then his source would smuggle the documents back to his office the following morning. "I was down there with a microfilm camera," he says. "This went on for five or six days. And then word came back that the U.S. ambassador had heard we were doing this . . . and so the embassy staff decided they had better get me out of there. They escorted me to the plane the next day."

On the Fulbright committee, and in his subsequent work on nuclear weapons, Iran-contra, and the Iraq war, Pincus has primarily been a document man — metaphorically, the guy with the microfilm camera, not the guy in the parking garage in Arlington. "Sy and Woodward, to some degree, get enormous amounts of stuff over the transom," he says. "But most of what I do starts with reading. I don't have big secret meetings."

During the run-up to the Iraq war, Pincus had

new material in the paper almost daily, often working in conjunction with his colleague Karen DeYoung. Pincus spent hours squinting at documents, making his way through Iraq's 1993 "final declaration" of its weapons programs and comparing its details to those in the 12,000-page accounting that Saddam Hussein released in December 2002. One great advantage that Pincus had during this period was his longstanding friendship with Hans Blix, then the United Nations' chief weapons inspector, whom he had met at a youth conference in Ghana in 1960 on one of his CIA-related jaunts. Consequently, Pincus and DeYoung were able to offer a tremendous amount of detail about the tug-of-war between the UN weapons inspectors and the various arms of the Bush administration.

As 2003 began, Pincus's coverage of the Bush administration's weapons claims was not notably skeptical. Indeed, drawing partly on Blix, Pincus often recounted the long history of Iraq's various weapons deceptions during the early 1990s. "There was no doubt in my mind," Pincus says, "that there was something there. You couldn't believe there was *nothing*." By March, however, the UN inspectors had done enough new searching to suggest that, improbably, the Iraqi regime actually had done away with its weapons programs. "The information pouring in over the last few weeks before the war about there not being weapons was just enormous," Pincus says. "But how do you prove a negative?"

On Sunday, March 16, three days before the war began, Pincus attempted to do just that, publishing a story that laid out the full case for doubt. In U.S. LACKS SPECIFICS ON BANNED ARMS, several unnamed intelligence officers and administration officials conceded that they lacked hard facts, and that much of the evidence they had compiled was circumstantial at best. It ran on page seventeen. (Leonard Downie Jr., the *Post's* executive editor, would later express regret that the paper did not give more prominence to stories that were skeptical of the administration's WMD claims.)

In future coverage, Pincus says, he will return to those crucial weeks in March 2003. He will most likely do so according to his longstanding personal rule of writing a sequence of short, 800-word articles, rather than saving his material for a gigantic Pulitzer-baiting opus. He learned that principle of incremental coverage in part, he says, from Andrew Lack, then of CBS News, in the early 1980s. "Andy came out of advertising," he says, "and he got me thinking that what news stories on the nightly news were — if you think of them as ads — it's the visuals, and the message, and it has to be repeated. That's how things get through to people."

Pincus says his reason for returning to the administration's case about Iraq's weapons is not to personalize the administration's follies — "the point is not to prove yet again that Dick Cheney over-

stated the case" — but to help future administrations avoid similar errors. In a February 10 page-one story, Pincus revealed that Paul R. Pillar, a former high-level CIA officer who was responsible for the agency's Iraq assessments during the prewar period, had accused the Bush administration of cherry-picking intelligence about Iraq's weapons. The story ended by stressing Pillar's wish that the CIA be restructured along the lines of the Federal Reserve, which would keep the agency in the executive branch but theoretically insulate it from political meddling. Where some people might look at the current political climate in D.C. of partisan attack and recrimination and see an abyss, Pincus sees an opportunity for reform.

**P**incus has spent decades cultivating a reputation as someone who won't burn sources, but that commitment has recently come under unprecedented strain. On June 12, 2003, Pincus wrote about a former ambassador who had gone on a fact-finding mission to Niger in early 2002. Expanding on earlier coverage by Nicholas Kristof of *The New York Times*, Pincus reported that the ambassador had found no evidence that Iraq had tried to purchase uranium there. Three weeks later, on July 6, the ambassador revealed his identity in an op-ed essay in *The New York Times* and in an interview with Pincus and

Richard Leiby in the *Post*. For better or worse, the world had been introduced to Joseph Wilson.

Then, on July 12 — two days before the immortal column in which Robert Novak mentioned that Wilson's wife, Valerie Plame, worked for the CIA — Pincus was on the phone with a person he describes as an administration official (and not Lewis Libby). They were talking about a somewhat different topic, and then the official began to complain about the attention that Wilson's arguments had been receiving. Didn't Pincus know, the official said, that Wilson's wife was at the CIA, and that she had cooked up the Niger trip? "It was, 'Why are you writing about it? It's a boondoggle. She arranged it,'" Pincus recalls.

This July 12 conversation, Pincus says, was the first time he ever heard of Valerie Plame's CIA employment. (In previous accounts, he has not been entirely explicit about that point.) He says he has no recollection of Woodward's mentioning Plame in the newsroom the previous month. He also says that while he was reporting the lengthy June articles on prewar intelligence, he discussed Wilson's Niger report with members of several federal agencies. Some of those sources criticized the report on various grounds, Pincus says, but "not one person mentioned Wilson's wife."

Pincus never wrote about Valerie Plame — in part, he says, because he already knew a fair

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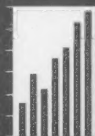
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amount about the origins of Wilson's trip from various sources, including some in the CIA. He did not think it was true that Plame had arranged the trip; and even if that were so, he thought, it had little bearing on the merits or lack thereof of Wilson's report. After Novak's column ran, he says, "I talked to the agency people, and they said it wasn't true."

Pincus says that he did not tell anyone — including *Post* colleagues — about the July 12 conversation for three months, even after Novak's column generated a firestorm and people began to wonder how extensive the administration's whispering campaign had been. Only when it became clear that the federal investigation of the leak was a serious one, Pincus says, did he feel a need to come forward. On October 12, Pincus and Mike Allen wrote a story about the investigation (the tone of which reflected a certain skepticism that criminal laws had actually been violated). The article mentioned that "a *Post* reporter" had been told of Plame's employment on July 12, but did not name Pincus himself as the reporter in question.

In mid-2004, Patrick Fitzgerald's office issued subpoenas to Pincus and the *Post*, demanding details of the 2003 conversations. Pincus initially refused to cooperate, but Fitzgerald soon made clear that Pincus's source was cooperating with the investigation, and that the source was willing for Pincus to speak to the prosecutors. "I have very strong feelings about protecting sources," Pincus explains, "and particularly about protecting the identity of your sources. But once it's clear that your source has come forward to the prosecutor, I don't think you have a leg to stand on." In an oft-repeated formulation, Pincus says, "It's the source's privilege, not the reporter's." Once his source had made it clear, through their attorneys, that it was okay for Pincus to talk, and after agreeing on some ground rules — including that the source's name would not be disclosed publicly and that Fitzgerald would not explicitly ask Pincus to confirm the source's identity — Pincus sat down to speak with Fitzgerald.

Pincus believes that the Bush administration acted obnoxiously when it leaked Valerie Plame's identity, but he has never been convinced by the argument that the leaks violated the law. "I don't think it was a crime," he says. "I think it got turned into a crime by the press, by Joe" — Wilson — "by the Democrats. *The New York Times* kept running editorials saying that it's got to be investigated — never thinking that it was going to turn around and bite them." The entire Plame investigation, he says, has been a distraction from a more fundamental conversation about how the White House handled evidence before the war.

On January 26 of this year, Libby's lawyers filed a motion asking for permission to subpoena the notes of reporters who crossed paths with Wilson. In the almost inevitable court battle over those notes, it seems clear that Libby's lawyers will use

Judge Collyer's November ruling in the Wen Ho Lee matter as a road map for their arguments. There is even some personnel overlap, as one of Lee's former criminal-defense attorneys, John Cline, is now representing Libby. In 2004, Cline joined the firm of Jones Day, which also happens to be the home of Brian Sun, the lead attorney in Lee's civil suit.

Despite the chill being generated by the Plame and Lee cases — combined with the federal investigation of the leaks that led to the stories of James Risen and Eric Lichtblau in *The New York Times* on the National Security Agency — Pincus says he is not terribly alarmed that sources will dry up. "You never know who's dissuaded during these periods when the government is more active in trying to stop leaks," he says. "But in the national security field, people who get concerned find a way" to get the information out.

Pincus remains confident that his younger colleagues will manage to cultivate similar networks of high-level sources, even if the culture of Washington no longer encourages the clubby relationships that existed back when Robert Kennedy would gossip with reporters at the Occidental restaurant. But while he is not anxious about sources drying up, Pincus is generally unhappy with what he describes as the print media's protracted retreat from serious news and analysis. "I think newspapers went wrong when they decided that in order to compete with television, they had to be more fuzzy and human-interest," he says. "In the serious news area, you've got to tell people *why* what they saw or heard actually happened, or what it really means."

Back in 1971, when he was hatching plans for the ill-fated *Morning News*, his idea was that his reporters would write two paragraphs at the end of each article in which they would explain, in italics, "what was really going on. It was based on the theory that the people who were writing were experts in what they were writing about. Even back then, I thought that news was being produced, managed, staged."

It's that kind of patient writing-in-italics — explaining how Washington's systems function and malfunction, not going after people by name — that will probably mark Pincus's legacy. That is the reason why sources, including the now-unnamed people who talked to Pincus about Plame and Lee, came to him. "If I worked in national security," says his *Post* colleague Karen DeYoung, "I can't imagine anything worse than having to talk to some reporter who doesn't know what he's talking about, or to be scared that this person is somehow going to burn you. To me, the reason people talk to Walter is that they know that he's careful. They know that he knows what he's talking about." ■

David Glenn is a senior reporter at The Chronicle of Higher Education.



Clark Parrish is using an FCC giveaway to build a national Christian radio network. Is he an entrepreneur or an opportunist?

## OUT OF THIN AIR



CLARK PARRISH

BY DANIEL SCHULMAN

**T**he theme of the sermon was "get off the dime" and the message resonated with Clark Parrish, who, at the time, felt he was in need of some direction. Not long before, Parrish, then in his mid-forties, had left a job with a national Christian broadcasting network, where he'd spent close to a decade. Now he was casting about for a new pursuit, figuring out what he was going to do with his life. The sermon brought everything into focus. Among a congregation of thousands, it seemed that God was speaking directly to him. He left church that day imbued

with a sense of purpose. He knew what he needed to do.

Weeks later, in November 2002, Parrish founded Radio Assist Ministry, a nonprofit whose mission is to spread the gospel over the airwaves and to aid other Christian organizations in doing the same. That month, he also formed an engineering firm, World Radio Link, that would help broadcasters construct their networks, prepare Federal Communications Commission filings, and broker radio spectrum, selling frequencies obtained through FCC auctions.

Parrish's timing couldn't have been better. The

MEAGAN THOMPSON

FCC was then preparing to solicit applications for FM translators for the first time in five years. Unlike a radio station, a translator, which resembles a stereo receiver in shape and size, doesn't originate programming, it simply receives and broadcasts a signal. Historically, translators have been used to fill in a broadcaster's coverage area, a means to extend a signal that would otherwise be blocked by geographical features, such as hills or mountains. In some rural areas, where placing a radio station is not financially viable, translators provide programming on frequencies that would otherwise broadcast static.

Starting in the early 1990s, though, translators, or repeaters as they're sometimes known, began to take on a new purpose. For noncommercial broadcasters, whom the FCC allows to feed certain repeaters via satellite, they have proved a low-cost way (no staff, minimal equipment and overhead) to rapidly establish a broad radio presence. A translator setup typically runs between \$4,000 and \$10,000 (not including the cost of leasing space on a radio tower, on which the device's antenna is situated), and, with a satellite uplink, a broadcaster can beam its programming to any number of translators simultaneously. Evangelical Christian organizations in particular have seized on this model as a means of spreading the gospel. And they have prospered. Take the Rev. Donald Wildmon's American Family Association, an organization that was recently in the news when it spearheaded a campaign to stop Ford, the automobile manufacturer, from advertising its products in gay and lesbian magazines. Wildmon first learned of the FCC's decision to allow noncommercial broadcasters to beam programming via satellite to translators in the late 1980s. He immediately grasped how this could benefit his organization's broadcast ambitions and, by extension, advance the group's conservative agenda. Within four years, between 1993 and 1997, the American Family Association was broadcasting on 156 stations in twenty-seven states. Its broadcast arm, American Family Radio, boasts on its Web site that translators allowed the organization to build "more stations in a shorter period of time than any other broadcaster in the history of broadcasting." Relying heavily on translators, Christian organizations such as the Educational Media Foundation and Calvary Satellite Network International (CSN) have enjoyed equally impressive growth. "You can do this dirt-cheap and the fact is you avoid any ownership limits," said Harold Feld, the senior vice president of the Media Access Project, a nonprofit, public-interest law firm that specializes in telecommunications. The FCC has long been warned that this loophole could be exploited to create national radio networks, according to Feld, but the commission has dismissed those concerns as "speculative and alarmist." He added, "The sad truth is that the agency is not very imaginative about these sorts of things." But even now

that the practice has moved well beyond the realm of imagination, with broadcasters employing hundreds of translators to forge nationwide footprints, the FCC, seemingly unperturbed, has taken no action to discourage it.

Around the time that Wildmon discovered translators, so did Clark Parrish. Then living in Marathon, Florida, midway down the Keys, and working as a repairman in an electronics shop, he had been taping a local Christian radio station, KILA, to share its programming with friends. He was particularly fond of a long-running radio drama called "Unshackled," which recounts the stories of people who say their lives have been transformed by Jesus. Using translators, Parrish realized, KILA's programming could reach a wider audience. In the late 1980s, he and a few friends established Tower of Praise, a nonprofit whose initial goal was to acquire a translator and use it to pipe the station's programming into their community. At the time, though, the organization was unable to obtain a translator.

In 1992, Parrish moved to Idaho and put his electronics experience to work for KAWZ, a fledgling Christian radio station in Twin Falls. The station was looking to grow. With Parrish's help, it now serves as the broadcasting hub of CSN and its nearly 400 stations — most of them satellite-fed translators — in locations from coast to coast. Parrish left the company in 2001, but continued to work for it on a contract basis into early 2002. Eventually, he parted with CSN altogether. In time, he began thinking of using his knowledge of translators to build a broadcast enterprise of his own. When in the fall of 2002 a pastor told his congregation to "get off the dime," that was all Parrish needed to hear.

For months before the FCC made an official announcement, it had been rumored that the commission would soon open a translator application window. On February 6, 2003, the day the FCC announced it would solicit applications that March, Parrish completed work on software designed to find open frequencies on which to place translators, which he'd been developing for months. On his computer, he could see the untapped possibilities spread out before him. Working with a small staff of radio engineers, Parrish spent the next month feverishly preparing for the auction. Many other broadcasters of varying size were no doubt doing the same. When the window opened on March 10, the FCC was deluged with more than 13,000 applications, close to four times the number of translators that were then in operation nationwide. Some broadcasters, Christian networks primarily, such as CSN and the affiliated Calvary Chapel of Twin Falls, filed for hundreds of translators. Parrish's Radio Assist Ministry and a second nonprofit, Edgewater Broadcasting, which one of his business partners,

Earl Williamson, incorporated a day after the filing window opened, applied for more than 4,000 — less than half the number the companies had been prepared to file for. The influx caught the FCC's media bureau, which processes the applications, by surprise. Peter Doyle, the chief of the bureau's audio division, told me that the commission had placed no cap on how many translators one company — or two commonly owned firms — could own, and thus apply for. Nor did the commission require that a company prove it had the available capital to make good on its promise to provide programming. (According to their 2003 business filings, Radio Assist and Edgewater had a combined \$38 in net assets

## The spectrum grab became known as the Great Translator Invasion. Clark Parrish was seen as the Genghis Khan of the translator conquest.

and more than \$380,000 in liabilities.) Nor, evidently, was the FCC particularly troubled when Parrish's companies began selling translator permits, which it had granted free, mostly to other Christian broadcasters, in deals ranging from \$2,000 to more than \$200,000 that began as early as July 2003.

If Parrish's dealings were of no concern to the FCC, they riled advocates of community radio, such as the Prometheus Radio Project, which had pushed throughout the late 1990s for the commission to create a low-power FM (LPFM) radio service that would help to diversify the airwaves, acting as a counterweight to a consolidated media landscape. Though the commission eventually started an LPFM service in 2000 — it has licensed nearly 700 low-power stations, each of which has a broadcast radius of three and a half miles — the advocates now saw themselves locked in a battle for spectrum with companies like Parrish's. If Parrish and others succeeded in placing translators across the nation, would there be any room left on the dial for community radio? Among LPFM supporters, the spectrum grab became known as the "Great Translator Invasion." In their eyes, Clark Parrish, whom they accused of trafficking in spectrum, was seen as something like the Genghis Khan of the translator conquest.

Indeed, Parrish and his two partners, Earl Williamson and Diana Atkin, who collectively sit on the boards of the nonprofits, as well as the for-profit engineering firm World Radio Link, have few defenders. Even Byron St. Clair, the president of the National Translator Association, an industry organi-

zation that represents the interests of translator operators, was critical of Parrish's companies, which he said had filed "clearly speculative applications." "No question in my mind. As soon as they get a [construction permit] they're out there trying to sell it." Nor does Parrish have an ally in the National Religious Broadcasters, a powerful industry association that lobbies on behalf of Christian broadcasters. "The idea of him brokering these things seems to be beyond the pale," the association's president, Frank Wright, told *USA Today* last spring. In February 2005 in Anaheim at the organization's annual convention, World Radio Link actively marketed translators on behalf of Edgewater and Radio Assist. It billed itself in the convention's newsletter as the representative of "the two largest filers of FM translator applications in the FCC's most recent FM filing window," and said that the companies "are making available for acquisition hundreds of these FM translator station construction permits to existing or new entrant Christian broadcasters throughout the country."

Gloria Tristani, the former FCC commissioner who is now the managing director of the United Church of Christ's office of communication, told me that Parrish's companies appear to have broken the spirit if not the letter of the commission's rules. "A lot of the applications were hoarded by particular companies who were using them to go beyond the repeating of a local signal, using them to create networks," she said. "And that's not what translators were intended for." I asked her whether, in her estimation, the companies were engaging in routine commerce or, rather, spectrum trafficking. "It certainly appears that way," she said of the latter possibility.

In March 2005, in the days before Michael Powell stepped down as FCC chairman, a coalition of LPFM advocates that included Prometheus, the Media Access Project, and the United Church of Christ filed an emergency petition with the FCC to halt the processing of translator applications. The brief centered on Parrish's companies, which the petitioners accused of fraud, trafficking, and deriving "unjust enrichment" at the public's expense. "Allowing the sale of naked construction permits in the broadcast services is contrary to the public interest and corrupts the integrity of the Commission's processes," the petition stated. But it left open the question of whether the firms broke any regulations: "It is possible that no individual transaction violated any specific rule governing either the application process or the sale of FM translators." It argued, however, that the commission is required to take action under the 1934 Communications Act (amended by the Telecommunications Act of 1996) in instances where an applicant's actions, taken as a whole, make plain it "intended from the beginning to speculate in Commission licenses rather than provide service."

In one of his final actions as chairman, Powell,

along with his fellow commissioners, froze the grant of pending translator licenses while the commission considered their impact on LPFM and solicited public comment. Since then, comments have poured in from individuals, industry organizations, and public and private broadcasters, filling FCC docket 99-25, which now holds more than 16,000 filings.

The application freeze, however, had little impact on Edgewater Broadcasting or Radio Assist Ministry. When it took effect, the FCC had already granted the companies more than 1,000 translator permits in locations across the country, of which the firms have since sold, traded, optioned, or donated more than 130.

Parrish's companies have also inspired congressional legislation, introduced in September by Representative Louise Slaughter, a New York Democrat. If passed, the Enhance and Protect Local Community Radio Act would place a cap on ownership of translators and impose restrictions on how they are sold and transferred. The legislation, which clearly alludes to Edgewater and Radio Assist, would also seek to revoke translator licenses that have created "unjust enrichment" and those that would not "serve the public interest."

In many ways, it is beyond remarkable that one man in Twin Falls, Idaho, who felt called upon by God, set these events in motion. It's equally impressive that his companies, which reported a combined \$38 in net assets in 2003, have so quickly laid the groundwork for a small powerhouse of a Christian network. Based on the average sale price for one of their translators, their remaining spectrum holdings, which the FCC granted free, could be worth as much as \$8.7 million.

**B**isected by a wide thoroughfare, an expanse of strip malls, chain restaurants, and motels running in either direction, Twin Falls is a sleepy city of 34,000 at the foot of southern Idaho's Snake River Valley. When I visited in late November, World Radio Link, also home to Edgewater Broadcasting and Radio Assist Ministry, was headquartered in a two-story office park just off Blue Lakes Boulevard, the city's main drag. (In early December, the companies moved to new offices across town.) Several miles from here, down the same road, the Calvary Chapel of Twin Falls, the nerve center of CSN, is housed in a squat, pre-fab building surrounded by tracts of farmland. An antenna, with a small satellite dish fixed below, sprouts from its roof. No fewer than eight large dishes point skyward in a lot behind the church; two more are attached to the left side of the building.

One morning, Parrish welcomed me to World Radio Link's spartan office suite. Tall, with medium-length gray-white hair and a neatly trimmed beard, Parrish is an earnest and friendly man of forty-eight who laughs hard and often. In person, the master-

mind of the Great Translator Invasion seems nothing like the diabolical character some of his critics make him out to be.

In some ways, Parrish is baffled that his companies have received so much attention. In others he saw it coming. "We did something really big," he said simply, seated behind a large wooden desk, not hiding a look of satisfaction. Nor does he mask his distress that some have labeled him, quite publicly, a crook.

He wondered whether part of the reason his companies have drawn so much ire is political. "It was commonly thought that radio played a big role in the last presidential election and conservative radio seemed to have the edge. Did that play into it? Do we not like the programming, is that part of the issue?" He went on, "Translators have been primarily implemented by Christian broadcasters. Maybe there's a problem with that." Parrish's detractors would strenuously disagree that their position is in any way political, but there is no doubt that liberals in general find the nexus of Christian broadcasting and right-wing politics threatening, particularly since hot-button moral issues such as abortion, gay marriage, and stem-cell research proved decisive (and divisive) during the 2004 election. In the age of Terry Schiavo, intelligent design, and faith-based initiatives, and under an administration led by a deeply religious president who has said that he felt called upon by God to run for office, politics and religion are increasingly inseparable. To those who oppose the ideology of the Religious Right, the notion that an aspiring Christian broadcaster with some know-how and a modest investment can spread the "good news" to a sizable public must be unsettling, to say the least.

From his desk drawer, Parrish pulled a color-coded map of the U.S., an engineering study depicting free spectrum around the country, along with areas that have been claimed by translators. The map showed an abundance of open spectrum — that is, available radio frequencies on which to transmit a signal — though translators had clustered in desirable locations, near densely populated areas. "There are lots of channels to choose from," Parrish said. "Is it that we're blocking them [LPFMs] from having channels? I don't see that, but I think it's certainly been represented that way." (Doyle, of the FCC's media bureau, agreed that the issue has been misrepresented by some LPFM advocates. "You can often put translators in places where you cannot put low-power stations. So Prometheus is fundamentally, and frankly, outrageously wrong when it has claimed that every translator bumps out a potential low-power station." That said, he continued, "Common sense tells you that given the enormous number [of translator applications], there has to be some preclusive impact. Maybe it's a lot, maybe it's not much.")

Parrish told me that from the beginning his intention, in creating a radio network, has been to "make



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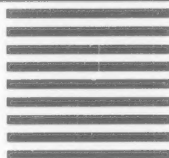
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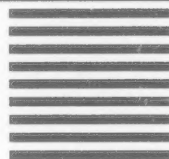
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a difference in people's lives" through Christian programming. To build a network from scratch, he and his partners crafted a novel strategy. "We didn't let this out of the bag to begin with," he told me, "but our plan was always a cart before the horse kind of thing. Get the translators, get them on the air however you can, then come back and provide the full-power stations. We call them the horses." When the translator filing window opened, he said, "I was probably the translator king. I'd been doing this for ten years, and I knew everything there was to know about translators. That's what made this possible."

Their business plan evolved over time, and selling and trading (and even donating) some of the trans-

His companies have earned as much as \$52,500 for a translator. All told, they have entered into more than \$900,000 in spectrum deals.

lator permits they acquired from the FCC eventually figured into their strategy. This served two purposes. One, it provided revenue to finance — at least in part — a network build-out, as well as the bargaining chips with which to trade other networks for FM stations — the proverbial "horses" to power their translators. It also allowed the companies to help other Christian organizations reach out through radio, which Parrish had always seen as central to their mission. To date, the companies have earned as much as \$52,500 for a single translator and sold others for as little as \$2,000. All told, they have entered into more than \$900,000 in spectrum deals.

Given that Radio Assist and Edgewater have accomplished this using free public spectrum, it's easy to see why some might allege impropriety, though one might just as easily accuse Parrish of being an exceedingly clever businessman. As Parrish pointed out, the companies are nonprofits, from which neither he nor his partners derive salaries — so financial gain is clearly not his motive. "I certainly have done nothing illegal," he said. It seems, in fact, that the companies have followed the rules, loose as they are, fastidiously. In conversations with several FCC officials, none suggested that Parrish's companies had strayed from the commission's regulations in obtaining or brokering translators, though two officials wondered, in retrospect, whether granting so much spectrum to the companies was the best use of public airwaves.

"It's of concern to us, because in many ways these translators are not providing the type of local

programming we really think the airwaves should be used for," an FCC official told me, requesting anonymity because the commission has yet to weigh in on this matter. "In certain instances, there's not such a public-interest benefit."

Parrish, for his part, made two trips to Washington, D.C., last spring, after the translator freeze, to plead his case to various FCC officials. He said one commissioner assured him that the commission would not rescind any of the translator licenses it had already granted. He was also told that he was perfectly within his rights to sell some of his holdings. The FCC's actions since then appear to bear this out, since the commission, which reviews sale and transfer agreements, has continued to greenlight the deals, even while pending translator applications remain in limbo. Taking their cue from the FCC, Edgewater and Radio Assist have continued to sell translators, entering into deals worth close to \$100,000 last fall.

The FCC official acknowledged that the agency must "refine" its regulations, placing limits on translator ownership and restrictions on sales. "You have situations where individuals have received them, then they've gone to the secondary market just to sell them off," he said. "And that thwarts the entire purpose." At some point, the FCC will sort through those questions, but the time frame for that is up to the commission's new chairman, Kevin Martin, the official said.

As for Representative Slaughter's legislation, which could disrupt Parrish's plans, it seems unlikely at this point even to come to a vote. The legislation has yet to find a Republican cosponsor, which, in a highly partisan Congress, means it could languish, according to her spokesman.

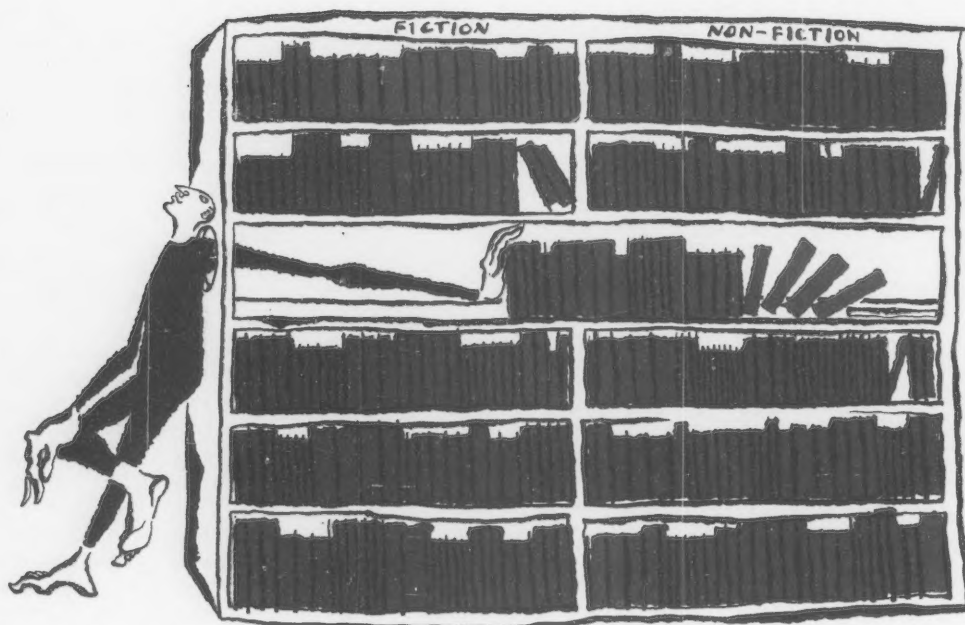
Meanwhile, Radio Assist and Edgewater are pushing forward, building their network in stages. In a series of sometimes complex deals that involved payments in both cash and translators, the companies have so far obtained five FM stations. One of them, in Markleysburg, Pennsylvania, recently went on the air. It will rebroadcast a local Christian station until Parrish's companies develop original programming, a task they're only just beginning. They're now completing construction on a radio studio in their new offices, and the city of Twin Falls has granted the companies a permit to install a satellite uplink. Things are starting to take shape.

Thinking about what lies ahead — outfitting and programming what could be a formidable Christian network — Parrish sighed heavily. "I woke up this morning and I was thinking this very thing, how are we going to get this done? God help me. Every way we can." ■

*Daniel Schulman is an assistant editor at CJR. CJR gratefully acknowledges support for this article from the Fund for Investigative Journalism.*

# IDEAS & REVIEWS

## ESSAY



BELLE MELLOR

## The Predictable Scandal

The book world's lack of devotion to truth runs much deeper than James Frey and the memoir

BY SAMUEL G. FREEDMAN

Several months before the shamuses of *The Smoking Gun* went in search of James Frey's mug shot, the august house of Farrar, Straus and Giroux published a handsome reissue of Vivian Gornick's memoir *Fierce Attachments*. Jonathan Lethem provided an introduction extolling the book for unflinching honesty in its portrayal of the author and her aging, embittered mother. The cover featured a photo of the two women during Gornick's childhood, caught in an embrace that

looked more claustrophobic than compassionate. And on the copyright page, the Library of Congress designated the book a biography.

From the careful package, a reader would never guess that *Fierce Attachments* might best be described as half-truth, as faction, as docudrama. Speaking during the summer of 2003 at a writers' conference in Baltimore, Gornick let slip that she had fabricated an unspecified number of scenes in the book, which is built around conversations be-



tween herself and her mother as they walk the streets of the Bronx. While in confessional mode Gornick also mentioned that she had pasted together composite characters in articles for the *Village Voice*. All of this, the author averred, was entirely legitimate within the realm of "personal narrative."

After one of the aspiring writers who had attended the conference reported Gornick's disclosures in *Salon*, the literature professor and book critic Maureen Corrigan addressed the issue in a commentary on *Fresh Air*, the NPR show. With her voice practically cracking, she framed Gornick's duplicity not as a matter of artistic license but betrayal. "What lying does do," she said, "is damage the relationship between reader and memoirist. Autobiography is a genre that is defined solely by a handshake. There's no internal distinction between an autobiographical novel and an autobiography. Rather, it's the autobiographer's pledge to try to tell the truth that makes a reader respond differently . . . . And when this quaint contract turns out to be a con, we feel like rubes."

The saga of *Fierce Attachments*, marketed anew just two years after Gornick's admissions without the slightest candor or shame, makes the James Frey episode the most predictable scandal in the world. As much of the reading public knows by now, *The Smoking Gun* (thesmokinggun.com) never found Frey's photo for its feature of mug shots of famous authors because he had never served three months in jail, as he had claimed in his memoir, *A Million Little Pieces*. What *The Smoking Gun* did find was that Frey had wildly exaggerated or entirely created various passages in his account of addiction and recovery, which was in the process of selling three and a half million copies as the selection of Oprah Winfrey's book club.

Far from being an aberration, Frey was merely traveling a well-worn path, especially for tales of personal or familial dysfunction.

The most significant revelation is not that he conveniently traversed the border between fiction and nonfiction, factuality and invention, but that the publishing industry purported to see absolutely nothing amiss in his method and offered up a series of self-justifying rationales to excuse it. Ultimately, it took Oprah herself, not the publishing industry, to pull the plug on the pseudo-biography. It took a talk-show hostess to speak up on behalf of all the deceived readers. Most publishers, it is plain, could not care less about conning them.

"Memoir is a personal history whose aim is to illuminate, by way of example, events and issues of broader social consequence," Frey's publishing imprint, Doubleday, said in a prepared statement after *The*

**It is inconceivable that *The Washington Post* would reissue Janet Cooke's invented portrayal of an eight-year-old heroin addict because it 'touched on a larger truth.'**

*Smoking Gun* broke the story. "By definition, it is highly personal. In the case of Mr. Frey, we decided *A Million Little Pieces* was his story, told in his own way, and he represented to us that his version of events was true to his recollections."

Nan Talese, perhaps the most renowned editor at Doubleday, added her personal defense of Frey in speaking to the reporter Edward Wyatt of *The New York Times*: "Nonfiction is not a single monolithic category as defined by the best-seller list. Memoir is personal recollection. It is not absolute fact. It's how one remembers what happened. That is different from history and criticism and biography, and they cannot be measured by the same yardstick."

Joyce Johnson, a longtime book

editor, writing teacher, and memoirist, told Patrick Reardon of the *Chicago Tribune*, "In a good literary memoir, you're basically rendering the essence of the experience. Whether someone is called Jane or Susan, who cares?" On other occasions, Johnson has urged memoirists to "exercise imagination."

Yet the abandonment of accuracy, of evidence, indeed of truth, is not a case of memoir exceptionalism. Though there are distinctions between the various examples, works of history and narrative nonfiction, such as Edmund Morris's *Dutch* and John Berendt's *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*, freely reveled in similar liberties, doing little damage to the authors' literary standing and commercial appeal. One can only assume that some editors, publishers, and literary agents privately despair about their profession's abdication of the entire concept of nonfiction. But only a scant number of them have been willing in the wake of the Frey affair to say so on the record.

One need only compare book publishers' evasions and justifications to the reactions of news organizations that have been faced with transgressions similar to Frey's. The disclosures that Jayson Blair and Jack Kelley fabricated elements in their articles led to the fall of the top editors of *The New York Times* and *USA Today*, respectively. Both newspapers conducted extensive, penetrating self-examinations to determine what had gone wrong and how the failures could be kept from occurring again. It is inconceivable, hilariously implausible, that *The Washington Post* would reissue Janet Cooke's invented portrayal of an eight-year-old heroin addict because it was so well-written and touched on a "larger truth." Yet very interestingly, some of the same reporters who have been defrocked — David Brock, Michael Finkel, Blair — have been welcomed by the publishing industry with six-figure book contracts. Fame and notoriety, which ought to be antonyms, have become synonymous.

## ESSAY

## IDEAS &amp; REVIEWS



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**T**he reasons for the publishing industry's indifference to factuality start with its business model. A newspaper reporter or a magazine staff writer represents the larger institution, and that institution has a collective stake in the accuracy and rectitude of each individual. A publishing house views an author as a contractor, no more or less the embodiment of the institution than the janitorial contractor who vacuums the halls overnight. And given the nomadic nature of book editors, especially in a period of corporate conglomeration of formerly independent imprints, relatively few authors will stay with a given editor for more than one or two books. Heads will never roll in a publishing house for editorial lapses the way they roll when necessary in a newsroom. Internal investigations will never be undertaken. If anything, the editor who signed up James Frey is probably in line for a bonus, given the memoir's gigantic sales, even after its fraudulence was revealed.

In the standard processes of a publishing house, a book manuscript never undergoes fact-checking. Copyediting is increasingly out-sourced to freelancers, and their mission is essentially to make the text conform to the house's standard style. A newspaper or magazine editor can decide how much to trust a writer based on years of having worked together, week in and week out. A book editor may meet a writer once during the acquisition process and a few times for lunch during the development of a manuscript, which hardly offers the basis for the vast amount of latitude given and the minuscule amount of editorial oversight applied.

Speaking from personal experience and from that of fellow authors, I can say that there are some editors who happen to insist on a standard of accuracy, who ask all the penetrating questions. But due diligence in

publishing remains an individual editor's option, not a job requirement or even part of the communal culture. The writer who wants his manuscript to receive the kind of fact-checking it would get from any major magazine either does it himself or pays for it out of his own pocket.

**A publishing house views an author as a contractor, no more or less the embodiment of the institution than the janitorial contractor who vacuums the halls overnight.**

In the conventional publishing contract, the institution seeks to establish its distance from — and its lack of responsibility for — its authors. The author indemnifies the publisher from legal action, even though, as a practical matter, most libel or invasion-of-privacy lawsuits still take aim at the publisher's deep pockets. The closest thing a book manuscript gets to thorough editing often comes when it is vetted by the publishing house's lawyer. But the purpose of that scrutiny is to pressure the author to remove any material, whether factual or not, that might get the publisher sued. If an author decides to concoct details of his or her life, as Frey and Gornick did, then the ruse will probably sail right through and into the hands of the unsuspecting reader.

Yet the collapse of the barrier between fiction and nonfiction does matter. It is not just the difference, as Joyce Johnson disingenuously put it, of whether someone is called Jane or Susan. Jane and Susan are not interchangeable labels; they are the names of real people, different people with different histories, personalities, and motivations. A nonfiction author should be limning exactly those

defining differences; to fail to do so is to tell a willfully incomplete story and also to be spectacularly lazy. Inventing characters, scenes, and events cannot be excused away as the subjectivity of memory. To "exercise imagination" as Johnson recommends, is to make things up. And, for that matter, why shouldn't memory, fallible as it is, be put to a test? Mary Karr, author of the acclaimed memoir *The Liars' Club*, recognized this when she recalled in a *Times* op-ed column her own informal research process. In revisiting the events of her turbulent adolescence, she discovered that far from being the victim of a neglectful father, as she remembered having been, she had made a choice to flee home and take up with a gang of drug dealers. This realization gave direction to her entire book. Being true to actuality rather than trusting memory alone changed the story 180 degrees.

Writers do not write only for themselves. The events that Frey inflated or invented — jail time, the suicide of a friend, the severity of his stay in a rehab clinic — went right to the core of his story of debasement and redemption. If he never bottomed out the way he described it and if his recovery was not one long, sadistic humiliation, then he is conning readers, passing off snake oil as an antibiotic.

Fiction isn't the spackle you use to fill in the cracks of your research. Fiction and nonfiction make fundamentally different compacts with a reader and are held to fundamentally different standards. In return for the freedom to invent, fiction must reach a benchmark of psychological truth. In return for the allegiance to factuality, nonfiction can present what may seem implausible and tell a reader, *But that's what really happened*. When John Berendt confessed to inserting fictional material into *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*, he tried to shrug off the violation by saying he was merely "rounding the corners" of the narrative, to make it as shapely as possible. But writing nonfiction

means having to live with corners that refuse to be rounded.

Since the James Frey scandal erupted, I have yet to hear anyone in publishing offer a persuasive explanation for why writing a biography of oneself or one's family should be held to less of a standard of factuality than, say, Ron Chernow is when he writes a biography of Alexander Hamilton. I have yet to hear a persuasive argument for why conducting scrupulous research for a memoir or family history should be considered antithetical to high literary achievement. The publishing industry has too much money to gain by holding to the debauched status quo, searching for the next Frey-style blockbuster, willfully forgetting the bit of wisdom that says, *If it's too good to be true, it probably is*.

In the end, the readers did revolt. Enough of them complained to Oprah that she dropped *A Million Little Pieces* from her book club, apologized for her earlier defense of Frey, and interrogated the author on

national TV, getting him to admit that he'd inflated his story partly out of a need to look macho and partly because he (correctly) suspected it would sell better. Only after Oprah disowned Frey did his agent and editor scuttle out to say that — heavens to Betsy! — he had told them that everything in the book was true.

I wouldn't expect anything to change in the publishing industry as a result of Frey's fall. I wouldn't expect fact-checking and stringent editing to be suddenly restored to the publishing process. I wouldn't expect the next batch of my-dysfunctional-family memoirs to come under any more scrutiny than did their lucrative precursors. You can be sure that in the eyes of a good many agents, editors, publishers, and critics, the only mistake James Frey made is that he got caught. ■

*Samuel G. Freedman teaches nonfiction book writing at Columbia's Graduate School of Journalism. He is the author of Who She Was: My Search for My Mother's Life.*

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## SECOND READ

## THE TRIPSTER IN WOLFE'S CLOTHING

JACK SHAFER ON TOM WOLFE'S *THE ELECTRIC KOOL-AID ACID TEST*,  
AND THE UNDERAPPRECIATED ART OF DISSECTING CULTURAL TRENDS

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**T**om Wolfe writes himself into the second sentence of his book about Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters, *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*, describing a boaty ride up and down the streets of San Francisco in the open bed of a Day-Glo-painted pickup truck. It's better than a half-year before 1967's Sum-

Tom Wolfe in his *Herald Tribune* years

mer of Love, and the New York City clotheshorse and leading practitioner of New Journalism looks dowdy compared to the beaded, feathered, medallioned, and head-banded crew of Kesey associates on board with him.

Wolfe sustains this "you are there" intimacy for the next 400 or so pages, taking you directly into the heads of his subjects when necessary to chronicle three years of Prankster adventures in consciousness along the California coast, across the country in *Furthur*, their now famous Day-Gloed 1939 International Harvester school bus, down to Mexico, where Kesey skedaddled to escape prosecution for possession of marijuana, and back to San Francisco.

The immediacy is an illusion, because as every Deadhead and tripster knows, Wolfe was never "on the bus." Yet Wolfe's illusion isn't a false one. It's a testament to his reportorial skills, which many readers miss because they're blinded by his bodacious punctuation. "Style can't carry a story if you haven't done the reporting," Wolfe once attested. As *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* approaches its fortieth consecutive year in print, it's still the best account — fictional or non, in print or on film — of the genesis of the sixties hipster subculture.

As a raconteur of that culture, Wolfe has competition. Hunter S. Thompson's sensational *Hell's Angels: A Strange and Terrible Saga* (1967), which shares locale and

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cast with *Acid Test*, introduces the libertine theme that Wolfe's book carries to completion: What possesses people living in a time of unparalleled freedom and a place of unmatched beauty to rebel and demand more? Thompson can't universalize his story because the Hell's Angels were allied with Satan and he didn't really want to in the first place. But Wolfe finds in the Pranksters the germ of a mid-century religious awakening with great potential for universalization, if for no other reason than that the Pranksters were on the side of the angels even though they caroused with the Hell's Angels.

Charles Perry captures the culture of hip in *The Haight-Ashbury: A History* (1984), and the novelists Richard Farina (*Been Down So Long It Looks Like Up to Me*, 1966) and T. Coraghessan Boyle (*Drop City*, 2003) reflect its spirit. What gives Wolfe the literary leg up on the competition is having a genuine hero — Kesey — who can carry his epic story about the origins of a new culture. Wolfe's Kesey is heroic in the Homeric rather than the tragic sense — manly, clever, a leader, daring, and charismatic. Wolfe's other great book, *The Right Stuff*, similarly exploits a real-life hero, Chuck Yeager, to excellent results. It's no accident that the portraits of Kesey and Yeager are more fully realized than that of any character to be found in Wolfe's fiction. His regard for his heroes has the added benefit of curbing his satirical voice. Satire, even served by a master like Wolfe, is a better spice than a main course.

**W**hat makes *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* all the more remarkable is that Wolfe composed its first version on newspaper deadline. It appeared in three installments in January and February 1967 for *New York*, the legendary Sunday magazine of the *New York Herald Tribune* that later would become

*New York* magazine, where he was on staff.

Writing for *New York* and *Esquire* in the sixties was like playing saxophone at the cutting contests at Minton's: You weren't just reporting and writing, you were competing against the likes of Jimmy Breslin, Norman Mailer, Gail Sheehy, Brock Brower, Gay Talese, Terry Southern, and others. These giants were restoring strong narrative, detailed reporting, and point of view to American feature journalism.

The competition extended to editors' offices. At the time, *New York's* editor, Clay Felker, and Harold Hayes at *Esquire* were rivals for Wolfe's widely acknowledged talents. Wolfe's breakthrough piece, "The Kandy-

ously his high-brow, Ph.D.-in-American-Studies (Yale) ideas about pop culture in a mass-circulation magazine.

Wolfe intended to fold the Kesey pieces into a future collection of work, but as he commenced to rewrite them he saw the potential of a book. This posed a reportorial problem: The Pranksters had been stoned so much of the time, so who was to say what was true and what was fable? Fortunately there were forty-five hours of film for him to mine that the Pranksters had shot of their Furthur road trips and "acid tests," those psyche-bruising parties in which they commandeered a hall, a club, or a warehouse and appleseeded California with LSD.

Wolfe also relied on the letters

## While both Kesey and Wolfe had their visions, neither turned out to be much of a seer.

Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby," about custom-car culture, had been assigned to him by *Esquire* during the 1963 New York City newspaper strike. Wolfe claims that he was blocked and that his editor, Byron Dobell, told him to send notes, as the magazine had already committed art and pages to the story. Working in the wee a.m. against the rock 'n' roll soundtrack provided by WABC-AM, Wolfe compiled a hyper memorandum that ran for forty-nine pages. According to the legend provided by Wolfe, Dobell struck the "Dear Byron" at the top and ran the notes as the story.

"Published notes" makes a great tale, so great that Hunter S. Thompson would deploy a variant of it to explain the visceral quality of his feature "The Kentucky Derby Is Decadent and Depraved," but "Kandy-Kolored" doesn't read like any writer's notes I've ever examined. What Wolfe may have discovered was his voice, previously smothered under editors' varnish, and the willingness of editors to take seri-

Kesey had sent from Mexico to his friend, the novelist Larry McMurtry, which he used to climb inside the acid king's head. Wolfe was an old hand at mind-meld journalism, having prospected the rock producer Phil Spector's brain in 1964 to describe his panic attack aboard an airplane in "The First Tycoon of Teen." "You really feel you know the person well enough and what their state was in this particular incident or you don't," Wolfe would later say, adding that Spector confirmed the accuracy of the account. "What I try to do is re-create a scene from a triple point of view: the subject's point of view, my own, and that of the other people watching — often within a single paragraph," he said in a 1966 interview.

The Pranksters also offered Wolfe the hours of madcap, reality-bending audio recordings they'd made. He interviewed dozens of Pranksters and Prankster fellow-travelers, Kesey's friends from his time at the Stanford University graduate writing program, such as Ed McClanahan and Robert Stone,

## SECOND READ

### IDEAS & REVIEWS

and he vacuumed up additional tapes and unpublished accounts to get the story. Hunter S. Thompson generously provided interview tapes and other recordings of the Hell's Angels at Kesey's place, explains Marc Weingarten in his valuable new book, *The Gang That Wouldn't Write Straight*. Finally, at a distance from the charismatic Kesey, Wolfe downed 125 micrograms of LSD to learn from the inside what the fuss was all about. His trip was unpleasant, but necessary. "It was like tying yourself to the railroad track and seeing how big the train is, which is rather big," Wolfe said in 1983.

If the magazine pieces were completed on a newspaper deadline, the book was written on a magazine deadline, with Wolfe producing the bulk of it in four intense months, revising in galleys, and publishing it to superlative reviews in August 1968.

Wolfe claims among literary inspirations a band of experimental Soviet writers — the collective "Serapion Brothers," Boris Pilniak, Yevgeni Zamyatin, author of *We*, and others — whom he encountered in the stacks during grad school. "From Zamyatin, I got the idea of the oddly punctuated inner thoughts. I began using a lot of exclamation points and dashes and multiple colons. A lot of dots. The idea was, that's the way people think. People don't think in well-formed sentences," Wolfe told *Rolling Stone* in 1987. The dots and dashes, the all-capital passages, the onomatopoeia ("whirrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr"), the odd ":::::" sequences, and other typographical excesses scar *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* like a bad case of jungle rot. In Wolfe's defense, strong experimentation was called for in a project about LSD

culture. As *Acid Test* has remained in print, its stylistic flourishes have become no more outrageous than William Faulkner's similar ambition, never realized, to publish *The Sound and the Fury* using different colored inks to communicate time and event.

Treating Kesey as a latter-day prophet and the Merry Pranksters as disciples who have discovered a new religion, new sacraments, and gone on the road to spread it could be judged a matter of a writer's Ph.D. overpowering a simpler tale about a group of founding stoners. "If there was ever a group devoted totally to the here and now it was the Pranksters," Wolfe writes in *Acid Test*. "I remember puzzling over this. There was something so . . . religious in the air, in the very atmosphere of the Prankster life, and yet one couldn't put one's finger on it." But by the time Wolfe describes Kesey and the Pranksters practically taking over a Unitarian retreat to which they had been invited and nearly driving the Unitarians and their children to religion, you begin to believe.

Of course, Kesey and the Pranksters didn't single-handedly invent psychedelic culture, and they weren't the only LSD proselytizers in the midsixties. Timothy Leary instructed his followers to drop acid in a quiet room, escape the material world, and merge with the godhead. The Pranksters, on the other hand, swung the big broom, sweeping everything into their acid gospel — trash and kitsch, consumer culture, spray paint, electronics, daredevilry, and practical jokes, and it was their version that rose to dominance. Young people in San Francisco,

then California, then around the world followed their template: The Pranksters literally wore the flag, which would become a cliché by 1969, if not before; they imagined themselves comic-book heroes; romanticized the American Indian; they playfully taunted the straights; and they danced all night as they immersed themselves in the mixed-media salad of rock music, tape-recorder feedback loops, whirling movie cameras, strobe lights, and cosmic light shows.

Whether the Prankster notions about how best to experience and interpret psychedelic drugs ascended because it was the optimum prescription or simply because Wolfe's best-selling report immediately achieved canonical status in every college town, high school, and dirt-road hamlet — wherever young people wanted to get high and drive — can't be teased apart. *Doonesbury's* cartoonist, Garry Trudeau, for one, lifted the name of Merry Prankster Steve "Zonker" Lambrecht and gave it to the Pranksteresque acid-head in his strip. Just as Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* inspires folks to hitchhike the country, Wolfe's book still provides map and route for modern explorers of internal space. What's the annual Burning Man festival — with all its costumes, modern pharmaceuticals, spacey music, bright lights, and tribal noise — but a grander, updated acid test?

If all journalism is autobiography, there's a fair bit of Wolfe in his portrait of Ken Kesey, the outsider, challenger of the literary establishment, and failed movement leader. Almost a decade before Wolfe declared his school of narrative-powered New Journalism as the successor to the novel and about two decades before Wolfe heeded his own call for the return of the reported novel by publishing *Bonfire of the Vanities*, Kesey had produced two reported works of fiction, 1962's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*

and 1964's *Sometimes a Great Notion*. The antiunion message of *Sometimes a Great Notion*, which glorifies strike-breaking loggers, makes the reactionary journalism of Wolfe's "Radical Chic," in which he lampooned a Leonard Bernstein benefit for the Black Panthers, seem like a Ripon Society pamphlet in comparison. Wolfe encouraged the comparison to Kesey in 1989 by rejecting the conservative and reactionary labels, telling the *Paris Review* he preferred being called a "seer."

While both Kesey and Wolfe had their visions, neither turned out to be much of a seer. The New Journalism didn't replace the novel, as the somewhat messianic Wolfe later predicted it would in 1973's *The New Journalism*, and Wolfe's successes with the reported novel haven't been widely imitated. Kesey, who abandoned the novel to stage drug-aided real-time dramas with the Pranksters, failed to take the psychedelic movement through the next "door" by going "beyond acid," i.e., to a place where drugs weren't needed. He wrote very little noteworthy fiction or nonfiction after *Sometimes a Great Notion*. He seems to have lost his bearings in the process of rising from literary fame to celebrity, which Wolfe describes in *Acid Test*. It would be fair to say the transformation from fame to celebrity has fatigued Wolfe, too.

**L**ike many forty-year-olds, *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* carries a wad of fat around its midriff that could be pruned without harming the body. Modern readers can scan the portions set like poetry without missing much. There's a sameness to many of the Prankster adventures — Hey, somebody else's acid trip can never be as interesting as your own! — and the book stalls for me when Kesey goes to Mexico. But as I recall reading the book when it was still green, when Kesey and acid

and Owsley and The Grateful Dead and psychedelia were still au courant, it hummed along with remarkable economy.

Far from inspiring a legion of journalists to renew the craft, Wolfe mostly — and quite inadvertently — spawned two generations' worth of boneheads who thought the lesson of New Journalism was to pound on the exclamation key while writing yourself into the story. He also became the scapegoat for journalistic scandal and excess — from Janet Cooke (the *Los Angeles Times* media critic David Shaw did the finger-pointing) to Bob Woodward's indulgent "you are there" scenes.

This is a little like blaming The Beatles for The Monkees. Had Wolfe never pushed the stylistic boundaries, we'd still be acknowledging his career-long knack for discovering cultural trends and making sense of them. It ain't an easy beat. The Department of Commerce doesn't publish quarterly statistics showing a rise in religious yearning, a spike in surf culture, or a growing societal trend of self-obsession that a cultural reporter can plot and graph.

As the Bible and many lesser books show, narrative is the finest container ever devised to transport ideas, especially transporting ideas over time. Forty years from now, when Wolfe's book, I predict, will still be in print, our grandchildren will be celebrating his role in resuscitating the narrative form. They'll marvel at his hack-like abilities to get just enough of the hard-to-get portions of the acid legend to tell the complete story with authority. And they'll be carrying a copy of *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* in their hip pockets. ■

*Jack Shafer writes the Press Box column for Slate. He thanks Michael Dolan, Andrew Ferguson, Nick Gillespie, and Jack Boulware for their willingness to feed him their good Wolfe ideas.*

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# IDEAS & REVIEWS

## BOOKS



## FAITH, REASON, AND MURDER

An intimate history of Buffalo's abortion wars oversimplifies the motives of religious extremists

ABSOLUTE CONVICTIONS: MY FATHER, A CITY AND THE CONFLICT THAT DIVIDED AMERICA

by Eyal Press

Henry Holt, 292 pp. \$25

BY JEFF SHARLET

**A**bsolute *Convictions* begins with a murder, that of the abortion provider Dr. Barnett Slepian, on October 23, 1998, and ends with an earnest plea for civility. "In the long run of history," Eyal Press writes, quoting from an anticommunist speech given by Martin Luther King Jr. in 1961, "immoral destructive means cannot bring about moral and constructive ends." Exactly, one can imagine Slepian's killer saying. *That's why abortion must stop.* One of the ironies lost on too many observers of conservative politics is that Christian conservatives consider King a model, his appeal to "moral clarity," as the evangelical powerbroker Rod Parsley puts it, serving as one of their justifications for seizing power.

Press, however, polishes up King's words to make them an endorsement of reason rather than spiritual force, as if King beat Bull Connor by convincing the sheriff that he was wrong. "Words and principled action," writes Press, "not

bullets or bombs" are the "only method with the true power to persuade." Perhaps. But matters of ultimate concern often drive true believers to the conclusion that compulsion, not persuasion, is sometimes an obligation. In *Absolute Convictions*, Press attempts to tell the story of that sentiment and the actions it spawned — most notably the murder of Barnett Slepian by an antiabortion activist — in Press's hometown of Buffalo, New York.

Press should be the ideal writer for the job. A talented investigative reporter who has published in *The Atlantic*, *Mother Jones*, and *The Nation*, he's also the son of another abortion provider targeted for assassination, Dr. Shalom Press, a former colleague of Slepian's. A deeply ethical journalist, Press is deliberately transparent in his sympathy with the abortion-rights "side" of the "the conflict that divided America," as well as scrupulous in his attempts to represent fairly the motivations of those who describe themselves as "pro-life" — even those who accept killing as an ac-

ceptable method in their advocacy of that position.

That balance, however, nearly obscures the animating forces of his story. Plotted on a neat narrative line from murder to nonviolence, Press's account is nonetheless framed by rawer emotions, neither lofty nor easily dismissed: his fear for the life of his father, an Israeli immigrant; and the belief, held by millions, including the anti-abortion activists who swarmed the Buffalo of Press's youth, that abortion has turned the United States into the site of a holocaust even worse than the one that Press's maternal Jewish grandparents survived.

And yet, even with such *sturm und drang* as its subject, the story Press tells lacks drama. In lieu of narrative complexity, it depends on the reader's good faith that "fundamentalism" results purely from a small-brained constriction of vision. When, late in the book, we finally meet Slepian's killer, James Kopp, Press explains him away in a few pages with the theories of Kathleen Puckett, a former FBI profiler who dumps Ted Kaczynski, Timothy McVeigh, and abortion-clinic bombers in the same dirty barrel and decrees that their problem, in essence, was that they couldn't get laid. "A striking aspect of the lives



of the men Puckett examined," writes Press, "was the frustration and powerlessness most felt in the presence of women."

Such thin description is beneath a careful reporter such as Press, but when it comes to exploring the stuff of his title — convictions — he too often defers unnecessarily to hokum-peddlers like Puckett. Kopp, Press writes, was a shy child who grew into a shy man unable to "sustain the intimate relationships" that would, apparently, have immunized him from "ideology" — used here as a synonym for extremism. Betrayed as a boy by an adulterous father who wrecked his family, Kopp naturally concluded that "the world was a profoundly broken place . . . where the line separating the sacred and the profane was clear."

Forget the fact that activist Christians don't need broken homes in their past to believe the world is fallen, one of the most basic tenets of the faith. What's confusing is Press's contention that fervent belief draws stark lines between the sacred and the profane. More often, and certainly in Kopp's case, such belief greatly expands the empire of the sacred, placing the profane within its borders and thus under its jurisdiction.

That's what Francis Schaeffer, the late "guru" of American Christian conservatism's 1970s revival, called a "worldview." For Schaeffer, "worldview" didn't denote a perspective so much as a position from which to launch a crusade. He did so with a series of erudite books written to spur evangelicals out of their self-imposed isolation and into the political sphere. The lever he pulled to make that happen was abortion, an issue of such moral obviousness, he decreed, that it imposed on Christians "not only the right, but the duty to disobey the state."

Press reports that Schaeffer's work was an inspiration to Kopp, who once made a pilgrimage to Schaeffer's Swiss mountain retreat. But Press lets the connection fizzle, reducing Schaeffer's influence on Christian conservatism — arguably greater than



MARK GOTBAUM

that of any intellectual in the last forty years — to Kopp's willingness to take up arms. Schaeffer's ambitions were much grander. He sketched a philosophy of politics in which the actions of men such as Kopp were nothing but ground-clearing, preparation for a complex vision that wasn't so much theocratic as "theocentric," a government ruled not by clergy but by ordinary people who view everything through the lens of God. Because this lens purportedly enables not just the best and the brightest but anyone to govern, the Christian Right believes itself to be radically democratic. It's a populist justification for the elitism by which the movement's most militant members believe they're called for special heroics, such as shooting an abortion provider.

Press limits Schaeffer to the fringe of both the evangelical movement and his analysis of it. He instead leans on the conservative contrarian Andrew Sullivan for his theology, quoting with approval Sullivan's self-satisfied declaration that the religious wars of our

time are not those of one faith against another but of "fundamentalism against faiths of all kinds that are at peace with freedom and modernity." This proposition sets religious beliefs on a shaky timeline. Good religion is modern, a faith for the future; bad religion is from the past. Such a formulation ignores the obvious fact that both coexist in the present.

There's something about religion that seems to incite otherwise excellent journalists to use the kind of truisms they'd scorn were they offered up by a politician. Consider what is perhaps Press's most wayward digression: his suggestion of a cosmic resonance between the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and the abortion conflict in America. Yigal Amir, Yitzhak Rabin's assassin, and Paul Hill, the murderer of an abortion provider in Florida, "were not isolated crackpots," he writes, "they were products of the militant strains of piety that took root within their respective subcultures. In these radical pockets of pure belief, the logic of violence flowed from a set of absolutes."

Press's recourse to a "logic of violence" — that the piety of the killers is identical — to explain political murders is not unlike the thinking that equates abortion with the Holocaust — which, if believed, really might justify the killing of Barnett Slepian. Such logic, in fact, doesn't flow from any set of absolutes, and it is not an adequate explanation for why Kopp killed Slepian or Amir murdered Rabin because it ignores the nuances

the false dichotomy of reason and religion to explore the ways in which activists used the former to benefit the latter. As a result, his portrait of the Rev. Rob Schenck, a brilliant and eccentric man who helped lead the anti-abortion movement in Buffalo, makes this deeply conflicted, even paradoxical character nothing more than a source of data, an informant. His profile of Marilyn Buckham, meanwhile, an abortion

"Reagan Democrat," a species more responsible for the development of anti-abortion politics in America than any Republicans of that era.

Griffin was a Democrat, but in 1977 he ran for mayor of Buffalo on the Conservative Party line and beat a popular black politician who supported abortion rights and whose Democratic nomination once would have guaranteed him the mayoralty. In 1982, Griffin declared the anniversary of the *Roe v. Wade* decision "Right-to-Life Day." Later he welcomed to Buffalo the militant anti-abortion group Operation Rescue. In many regards a competent mayor, Griffin faced the impossible task of saving Buffalo from federal policies that were, even before Reagan, heavily weighted against urban cores, much less blue-collar, industrial cities. In lieu of jobs, Griffin offered moral indignation, directed less at the causes of Buffalo's economic demise than at the practice that was destroying the last purely good thing many Buffaloes could imagine — babies.

That's not false consciousness, however. It's a "worldview." A dangerous one, perhaps, but not the simple substitution of "moral values" for material concerns. Press attempts from the beginning to avoid that analytical pitfall, but his narrow view of religion prevents him from doing so when he moves from men such as Griffin to those like James Kopp. Wrestling with the theologies, plural, that produce killers such as Kopp requires that we not pathologize people like him but examine them with as much nuance as Press brings to his portrait of Griffin. It's not enough to note, as Press does, that Kopp's thinking was coherent within its own crazy confines. Rather, as reporters we must mix material analysis with religious imagination. We must inhabit, for at least a moment, the souls as well as the minds of killers. ■

## As reporters we must mix material analysis with religious imagination. We must inhabit the souls as well as the minds of killers.

of history. When one considers the totality of why extremists decide to kill in the name of religion, the circumstances, and the motives of the killers end up being very different.

To be fair, Press introduces this idea through the story of his father. But Dr. Press, we learn repeatedly, is not given to subtle thinking. When Press asks him why he began offering abortions, "he flashed me a look that suggested he'd never really thought about it before." Even after protesters started targeting his practice in 1985 with picket lines, raucous sit-ins, and noisy protests outside the Press home, Press's father "didn't consider the political implications at all." He believed in "moderation," Press tells us, and was suspicious of "extremism."

Press devotes much attention to his father's biography, but instead of making *Absolute Convictions* more personal, this focus puts a vacuum at the book's core. Press seems mystified by his father, reduced by the man's reticence to interviewing former employees who can do no more than confirm that "he wasn't the chattiest person in the office." But even had Shalom Press been more expansive, he still wouldn't have been the heart of this story. Its pulse is not the abortion providers, who were simply doing their job ("It was work," Dr. Press tries to explain to his son), but the activists who discovered that doctors were the "weak links" in the system.

Press remains too committed to

provider whose dedication to the cause is more politicized than Press's father's, is better because she arrives at her position by a route that Press recognizes. And his sketch of Karen Swallow Prior, an anti-abortion activist who's also an academic and thus capable of speaking in terms with which Press is more comfortable, is compelling, if too brief.

Although its history of anti-abortion activism and violence is hindered by Press's faith in balance, *Absolute Convictions* remains a useful book, especially in its depiction of the struggle over abortion as a series of intensely local battles rather than a political war of words in Washington. Press is never less than insightful when he examines his hometown through a historical telescope, charting the decline of the city's once-strong labor community and the subsequent rise of a politician named Jimmy Griffin, "a former grain scooper who knocked back his share of beers and rarely minced words. 'I'm just like one of you,' he would tell his supporters, and you didn't have to ask what color skin (white), religion (Catholic), or ethnicity (Irish) this implied." Press's capsule history of Griffin's career and the convergence of deindustrialization, racial tension, and the long-term revival of religious sentiment in America is perceptive and valuable, a contribution to our understanding of the evolution of the

*Jeff Sharlet teaches at New York University, where he edits TheRevealer.org, a review of religion and the press. His writing about evangelical Christianity has appeared in Harper's, Rolling Stone, and The Dallas Morning News.*

## BOOK REPORTS

### IDEAS & REVIEWS

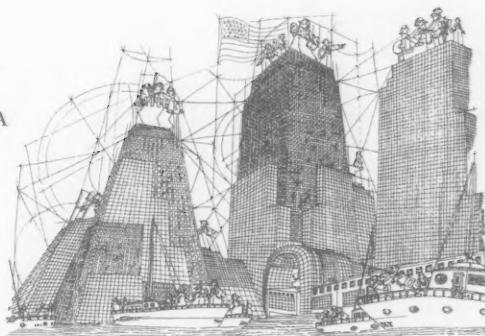
BY JAMES BOYLAN

THE MAN EVERYBODY KNEW:  
BRUCE BARTON AND THE  
MAKING OF MODERN AMERICA  
by Richard M. Fried  
Ivan R. Dee  
286 pp. \$27.50

The name of Bruce Barton (1886-1967) has faded. He is recalled occasionally through Franklin Roosevelt's 1940 campaign epithet, "Martin, Barton, and Fish," or disdainfully noted by professors as the author of *The Man Nobody Knows*, a 1925 book that portrayed Jesus as a crackerjack sales force. In this crisp biography, Richard M. Fried of the University of Illinois-Chicago shows the extent of Barton's true influence — as a founder of modern advertising through the agency that became known as Batten, Barton, Durstine & Osborn and, even more significantly, as a pioneer in modern political advertising, starting with publicity for Calvin Coolidge. Until his final years, Barton was a whirlwind, spinning off magazine articles, making speeches, producing aphorisms, counseling politicians, and even serving in Congress himself. Fried concludes that "he remained, if not a generalist, someone with an ability to hopscotch among the various avenues of his life."

VIGILANTE NEWSPAPERS:  
A TALE OF SEX, RELIGION,  
& MURDER IN THE NORTHWEST  
by Gerald J. Baldasty  
University of Washington Press  
189 pp. \$22.50

Here is a case from the time a hundred years ago when newspapers had a monopoly on covering sensational murders such as the killing of the architect Stanford White by Harry Thaw, and of



Grace Brown by Chester Gillette (the basis of Theodore Dreiser's *An American Tragedy*). In this instance, one George Mitchell shot down a David Koresh-like evangelist, Edmund Creffield, on a Seattle street in 1906. Two Seattle newspapers, the *Star* and the *Times*, instantly set about to vindicate the killer as the defender of his wronged sisters, who were Creffield's disciples. The newspapers got what they wanted, an acquittal, only to have one of the sisters gun down her brother. Only then did the newspapers begin to have second thoughts about unpunished murder. Gerald Baldasty of the University of Washington tells the story vividly, exploring the implications for both the journalism and the gender assumptions of the time.

JUST ENOUGH LIEBLING:  
CLASSIC WORK BY THE  
LEGENDARY NEW YORKER  
WRITER

by A.J. Liebling; introduction by  
David Remnick; editorial advice by  
James Barbour and Fred Warner  
North Point Press  
534 pp. \$27.50, \$15 paper

A. J. Liebling (1904-1963) deserved better. This anthology, evidently designed to commemorate the centennial of his birth, seems to have been assembled offhandedly, according to no distin-

guishable principle beyond a few loose categories, such as Paris, World War II, and boxing. James Barbour and Fred Warner, English professors emeriti at the University of New Mexico, have edited Liebling anthologies in the past, but in this instance they are merely given thanks for their "invaluable insights";

no editor is listed. Nor does the brief biography and appreciation by David Remnick, editor of *The New Yorker* (who arrived at the magazine nearly three decades after Liebling died), really explain much about the contents. The Liebling reprints are, of course, worthwhile reading as always, but, dismayingly for those of us who regarded him as the spiritual leader of insurgent journalism, there is a mere handful of his critiques from "The Wayward Press" department, squeezed into a slim segment near the end. Maybe the best thing about the book is the fine dust-jacket photo portrait, by Liebling's colleague Lillian Ross.

THROUGH THEIR EYES:  
FOREIGN CORRESPONDENTS  
IN THE UNITED STATES

By Stephen Hess  
Brookings Institution Press  
195 pp. \$44.95, \$18.95 paper

This is the sixth volume in the series called "Newswork" that the scholar Stephen Hess first undertook for the Brookings Institution in 1981; the best known remains the first, *The Washington Reporters*. Here he studies the work of foreign journalists in the United States, now numbering about two thousand, and concludes that their work is difficult, but that on the whole they provide a mediating effect on the often strident anti-Americanism of their home offices.

## IDEAS &amp; REVIEWS

## PASSAGES

## IN THE BEGINNING . . . OUR PARADOXICAL PRESS

It was the best of times, it was the worst of journalism — and it is no small irony that the former condition led directly to the latter, that the golden age of America's founding was also the gutter age of American reporting, that the most notorious of presses in our nation's history churned out its copy on the foothills of Olympus. The Declaration of Independence was literature, but the *New England Courant* talked trash. The Constitution of the United States was philosophy; the *Boston Gazette* slung mud. The *Gazette of the United States* and the *National Gazette* were conceived as weapons, not chronicles of daily events; the two of them stood masthead to masthead, firing at each other, without ceasing, without blinking, without acknowledging the limitations of veracity. Philadelphia's *Aurora* was less a celestial radiance than a ground-level reek, guilty of "taking a line that would have been regarded as



treasonable in any later international conflict." And *Porcupine's Gazette*, the *Aurora's* sworn foe, was as barbed as its namesake.

Perhaps, then, they were not the best of times. Perhaps they were too divisive, too uncertain. Perhaps they only seem the best in retrospect, to generations who live in the country that those times produced, under the laws they established and the rights they defined and the liberties they so carefully prescribed.

But in many ways the men and women who settled the New World were the best of people. Surely not the type to print lies in their

newspapers when the truth was insufficiently compelling or contradictory to their causes; to smear sex scandals across their pages or raise invective to levels previously unknown outside a cockfighting den. Not the type to confuse hyperbole with fact or scatology with analysis; to be ill informed or uninformed or misinformed; to correct their mistakes rarely and grudgingly; to inflate a peccadillo into a crime; to condemn a lapse of judgment with a sentence of perdition; to encourage violence against those who disagreed with their views.

Yet they did it all, these best of people, all of it and more, time and again over the course of many decades, an incendiary press somehow becoming the basis of a humane and enduring society. ♦

from **INFAMOUS SCRIBBLERS: THE FOUNDING FATHERS AND THE BEGINNINGS OF AMERICAN JOURNALISM**

by Eric Burns  
PublicAffairs. 480 pp. \$27.50

## WHAT HAPPENED IN MINNEAPOLIS, WILLIE?

In 1969 one William S. Blair suddenly appeared as business manager at *Harper's*. I did not see much of the man or know much about him. Willie said he could not discern what Blair's duties were: "He spent a small fortune redecorating his office, money we damn well could have used to pay writers for articles, and yet Blair just sits on his butt for the most part except when he's nosing around me."

On the other hand, Willie thought Blair did too much in terms of trying to set the editorial agenda. "All

those damned surveys, asking our readers picky questions about which article they read first in the last issue, which one they read last, did they like this thing or that thing, what would they like to read in *Harper's*? Asking our readers about their hobbies, what sports they liked, where do they vacation, all manner of rot." Willie had called Minneapolis to complain that he

thought such surveys were worthless — though terribly costly — and asked if they were designed to take control of the magazine's content away from the editor? Oh no, Cowles assured him: just routine.

I never learned at what point Cowles told Willie that he was changing Blair's title to president and chief executive officer of the corporation running *Harper's* and that he was





to thereafter be considered Willie's superior. Willie didn't tell his staff. Indeed, he seemed to have a CIA "need to know" policy when it came to sharing with us just what occurred at all those high muckety-muck meetings in Minneapolis; we were told next to nothing. My best guess is that the change occurred in early 1970, because that's about when Blair referred to himself as "The Boss" when talking with me. Being a skilled diplomat I immediately said, "You're not my boss. I'm not a goddamned accountant. I'm a writer. Willie Morris is *my* boss." I number that incident among the several times I forgot that I was a mere mill hand, too.

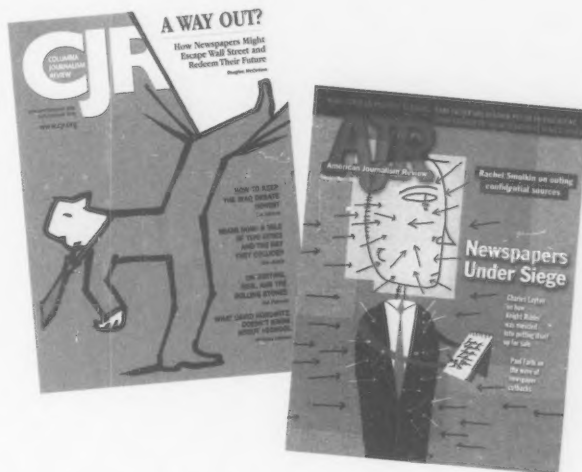
Still, none of us realized the extent to which Willie and the Cowles people were on the outs — until the opening volley of shots of a very heavy caliber. We knew a little something was amiss, just didn't feel right, and at times we fretted a bit over Willie's erratic conduct. But he continued to produce; with each new *Harper's* issue came praise in the media, at dinner parties, from other writers and editors, on our travels, in the mail. We could compare what we were publishing with our competitors and feel confident that nobody was putting out a better magazine: not *Esquire*, not *The New Yorker*, not *New York*, not *Atlantic Monthly*, not *Life*, not *Playboy*, not *Commentary*, not *The New Republic*, just no-by-God-body. So how could that be faulted? We wrote our articles and our books, feeling maybe a bit smug, certain that any problems between Willie and Minneapolis were minor bumps on our smooth highway. And when the firing started, we were as startled and unprepared as American forces had been at Pearl Harbor. ♦

**from IN SEARCH OF WILLIE MORRIS: THE MERCURIAL LIFE OF A LEGENDARY WRITER AND EDITOR**

by Larry L. King  
PublicAffairs  
368 pp. \$26.95

## WHAT DO THESE NINETEEN SCHOOLS SHARE?

Alabama, Arizona State, Auburn, Columbia, Connecticut, East Tennessee State, Kansas, Kansas State, Maryland, Michigan State, Missouri, Nebraska-Lincoln, Nebraska-Omaha, Notre Dame, Northwestern, Penn State, Pittsburgh, Syracuse, and Temple



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## SCENE

# The Sound of Hope

BY AYESHA AKRAM

A hushed news meeting is under way on the sidewalk that borders the thirteen glistening blue and green tents that make up Radio Muzaffarabad's "offices." It is two minutes to air, and Tahir Chughtai, the program producer, looks worried. A colleague whispers in his ear. He nods vigorously and strides over to the broadcast booth. "You're on," he says, poking his head into the tent. Seconds later, a cracked "On Air" sign lights up. "It's 2 p.m., and this is Radio Muzaffarabad," begins Nisar Fatima in her native Urdu. "In this hour we will bring you news from the earthquake zone."

Music comes up, and Fatima adjusts the drab red shawl covering her head against the chilly wind. The on-air light dims, and her calm demeanor evaporates. "It's still difficult to work," she says. "My heart isn't in it."


Fatima, who is twenty-one and a part-time host at the station, lost two cousins, four friends, two classmates, and a devoted teacher in the 7.6-magnitude earthquake that hit northern Pakistan on October 8, killing an estimated 85,000 people and leaving three million homeless. Fifteen days after the quake, Radio Muzaffarabad, a government-owned station in the city of the same name and nestled in the Himalayas, was back on the air with borrowed equipment. It is now more than four months since the quake hit, and the station is the single, precarious thread that binds this wounded city of about half a million residents. More than just a source of news and information, Radio Muzaffarabad has been a way for people — most of whom are still living in tents — to talk to one another; it has helped families find missing loved ones, facilitated mourning, and inspired the desperate to persevere.

Chughtai's tent, which faces the ruins of the station's old studio, functions as a makeshift headquarters. Five of the station's engineers sleep here at night. A dirt-smudged computer whirs laboriously next to the lone fax machine. "We don't even have one quarter of what we lost," says Chughtai. "We're barely surviving."

Where the station once reached five million listeners in a hundred-mile radius of Muzaffarabad, its depleted signal, powered by a one-kilowatt transmitter, now struggles to make it forty-five miles. Of its 115 employees, three were killed in the quake and forty-two others quit, too grief-stricken to stay on. Airtime was reduced from sixteen hours to eleven, and the regular programming was scrapped as the station urged listeners to call in with requests for help or messages to send out. People responded with over a hundred calls a day.

But today is Eid, a religious holiday, and Chughtai thinks listeners could do with a little less reality. He asks a producer to broadcast some music. "Let's get their spirits up," he says. "Let's add smiles to their faces."

A handful of music tapes salvaged from the rubble are scattered on a table in the engineering tent. Pervaiz Minhas, a broadcast engineer, plays a patriotic classic, "Oh! Life." Tears glisten in his eyes as he listens to the words of hope. "Oh life, where can I find you?"

"All of us lost someone," says Minhas, who is forty-eight. He lost his wife. Wiping his eyes, he says, "My wife was a teacher — she was so beautiful." 

*Ayesha Akram is a student in the Master of Arts program at Columbia's Graduate School of Journalism.*

# The Lower case



OMAHA WORLD-HERALD

## Legislators dive in on tax cut plans

Omaha World-Herald 1/5/06

### White House, McCain agree on torture

Green Valley (Ariz.) News and Sun 12/16/05

### Treasury Inspectors Clear Snow

The Wall Street Journal 12/12/05

## Survey reports acceptance of fat people growing

San Mateo Daily News 1/12/06

### Judge Is Asked to End Hunger Strike

Los Angeles Times 9/22/05

## Boro, railroad aim to strengthen ties

The (Johnstown, Pa.) Tribune-Democrat 6/8/05

### SORRY TRIBES TAINTED BY ABRAMOFF

The (Monterey County, Calif.) Herald 1/12/06

### Providence Cleared In Officer's Death

The New York Times 12/10/05

### Ban on abusing priests to be kept

The Bellingham (Wash.) Herald 6/17/05

### State injects mountains with vaccine

(Hendersonville, N.C.) Times-News 11/30/05

### Plants agree to ax emissions

(Albany, N.Y.) Times-Union 1/12/05

## Mayor to leave town in good fiscal health

The Providence Journal 12/16/04

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